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The French Spy; OR, THE BRIDE OF PARIS.

A Thrilling Story of the Commune.

BY A. P. MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE FIRE-FIENDS," "AZHORT,
THE AXMAN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE OF M. ACHEFORT.

UNHAPPY and deluded France!—most wretched Paris!

In Paris we locate our story; in Paris when the desperado ruled, and vice was rolling its chariot howling toward the sea of Anarchy, crunching beneath its wheels the monuments of a once proud city—when ravage, fire and sword

toppled her fair fabrics of renown and drew a pall of death and desolation round the erst gay Capital.

In Paris, its confusion, bloodshed and disgrace—being a starry clear night in the month of April.

A weird house situated on Rue de Lafayette, probably the largest and oldest edifice in the vicinity, standing like an owl on sentry—with its long, rounded-cornice windows just ogling over a thick stone wall at the front, its shabby, wing-like walls, its flat roof, mouthy doorway—grim and dole behind a number of trees that grew neglectedly on the narrow plot at the front and scraped their gnarly boughs against a battered porch all bedraggled with tangled creepers.

And this was *Le Bibou*. They who knew it best by sight and reputation shrugged their shoulders at mention of it, or regarded it distrustfully when they passed by it, and efforts had been made to raze it. Why?

Because this hotel-of-a-house, *Le Bibou*, was

the abode of Xlmo, the Voodoo woman—and Xlmo we shall see before long.

Directly opposite *Le Bibou* were two four-story edifices comparatively new and not yet tenanted throughout. They confronted the den of Xlmo, the Voodoo, like two rebukes, like two ever-watchful guards; as if to make more disagreeable, by contrast, the aspect of the witch's den, and as if to spy upon its internal sorceries—for they were the only buildings near of size to compare with it; one the property of M. Achefort, the other belonging to M. Epont.

That of M. Achefort first demands our attention.

The fourth and last floor, flat, or *suite*, of this house was rented by one Dorlan Ray, a painter by profession, an artist of some reputation, an American by birth; he and his daughter, Osalind, absorbed solely in each other, and in the business of the father whose skill was fast being acquired by the child.

Thus they lived, the father and the daughter, in the fourth story, or attic, of M. Achefort's



"A MORT! A BAS ASSASSINS!" HELEN VARCLA RUSHED UPON THEM WITH THE SWORD OF THE MAN WHO HAD STUMBLERED AND THE SWORD OF THE MAN SHE HAD KILLED.

property, on Rue de Lafayette, where rents were cheap; having few acquaintances and amply satisfied with their mutual affection, besides a tolerably substantial patronage.

We look in on them at or about the hour of ten, this night of April—when their labors for the day were well done, and the evening repast was over. Osalind sat on a hassock beside the knees of Dorlan Ray.

His locks were silvered, though fifty years had scarce passed over them; struggle and trial, perhaps, had set those wrinkles in his face. An apparently aged man; and she—just nineteen, glorious in youth's wealth of charms, whose qualities and loveliness would have honored a throne.

A cloud was on the brow of the artist; sadness and deep thought were imprinted in the face of the beautiful Osalind. One of his strong arms encircled her, holding her as if from some lurking danger in that room of easels, pallets, brushes, paints and half-finished pictures.

Anon he glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, and down at the fair head by his knee; and with every glance a sigh broke from his lips, while he muttered:

"How slow time drags—how very, very slow. I thirst for this meeting now; and for years I have been frightened by its prospect. He will be punctual; he never failed to carry out a threat. Can I be calm?—can I keep my fingers from his throat, and my grip from his carcass?—beast, vulture, devil-of-flesh! How slow!"—another glance at the lazily-ticking clock—"he said 'at half-past ten.' Heaven lend me strength to meet and defy him. Osalind?"

"Yes, father."

"Can you be brave?"

"Brave as you, dear father. I have never seen, and do not yet know how to fear the wretch whom you expect to come here—this Victor Bramont."

"True, you never saw him—a 'black sheep,' outcast from his family, just the reptile to crawl and pry at secrets. He stood alongside your crib seventeen years ago, Osalind," the last in a short breath.

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No. But he promised to find me, at half-past ten, on the night of your nineteenth birthday—to-night. I have told you the rest." He folded her closer to him, and smoothed back the golden hair from her forehead.

"Oh! father," cried Osalind, looking up into his troubled face, "you have not told me *all* the rest. In what lies the power of this man?—that his name, his expected presence has driven away your old-time smile, and made you talk and act unlike the parent I once knew, unlike the noble Dorlan Ray whose brush has worked well for fame. So changed! I have seen you grow sick at your easel—the canvas has lost its charm; you are haggard and worn as if with disease; you do not go out and mingle as you once did—"

"It is unsafe for me to be abroad in times like these, Osalind. The streets of Paris are reeking with blood; the bullet and sword are laying people dead in their tracks. Of what were you thinking when I spoke to you, my child?"

"Of Franz Edouin," she replied, and with utterance of the name a rich color suffused her cheeks to the temples.

For a brief space the artist's eyes sparkled.

"Noble Franz!" he exclaimed. "I love him, Osalind. Would that he could be here now. Franz is at Versailles. Paris has fallen once—she must fall again, then rise; and in that hour Franz shall be your husband and my son. Mine? Where may I be? I feel evil brooding for me even now, Osalind."

"Don't talk so, father. We have but one evil to fear—Victor Bramont. Franz will soon come to claim me, for he remembers the promise I gave him when he left Paris. Victor Bramont is our only shadow—this man of mystery and power. You say that he wishes me to wed him—he, a villain, libertine and outcast. You say, in case I refuse him, his heel may crush you and his machinations destroy me. If this is so, and there is such fear of him, how can you defy him, when his vengeance may be worse than his demands? Oh! father, to give up Franz Edouin—what sound was that? I thought I heard a noise in the entryway."

"Hush!" he commanded, suddenly; "was not that the rumble of a chaise?"

They listened. A bell tinkled below, then a second, presently a third.

Footsteps on the stairs in the hallway. A low rap came at the door; and Dorlan Ray, with eyes distended and bent upon the clock, missed, between his clenched teeth:

"It is he. Osalind be brave. Fear not yet, my child. You shall see how I mean to defy this Victor Bramont," and one of his hands, its fingers working and coiling nervously, slipped into his breast to the butt of a pistol.

The clock on the mantelpiece lacked but a few minutes of 10:30.

Again the rap for admittance, and louder than at first.

"Come in!" he said, terribly calm.

The messenger of the *conciierge*.

"*Voilà! un gentilhomme ici pour vous.*"

And as the messenger spoke, and he stepped

aside, bowing, they heard some one else approaching along the hallway with hard, firm strides, accompanied by the ring of spurs and the clank of a saber on the floor.

Whiter paled the face of Osalind, but her deep blue eyes flashed steadily. Sterner grew the countenance of the artist, as he waited for the man he dreaded yet would defy—Victor Bramont—and the reader will see him shortly, besides arriving at an explanation of why his advent should cast a chill upon the soul of Dorlan Ray.

But it was not Victor Bramont!

A military officer stood before them, hat raised and lips smiling. A Frenchman about thirty years of age, rather handsome, dashing, wearing numerous badges on a showy uniform.

Lucky for Victor Bramont that it was not he. The hand of the artist—the one he held in his bosom—grasped the pistol with hammer cocked, and with its bullet he meant to defy the power of his enemy.

We say this officer was handsome; but his good looks were treacherous, his smile was of that dangerous kind which covers a nature fraught with slyness, deceit and spleen. His voice, when he spoke—like his eyes as they sparkled—contained something to repel and create instant dislike.

"Ah! good-evening, Monsieur Ray; you did not expect me?"

"Philip De Vin!"

The artist's face relaxed its almost fierceness; relief was evident in him when he saw that it was not the hated Victor Bramont. But the change in his features was to a frown of annoyance; and as he uttered the name of the visitor, he betrayed, by his accent, that Philip De Vin was hardly less distasteful than Victor Bramont was feared.

Osalind regarded him uneasily; but, save a start and a mechanical motion of the golden-haired head, she gave him no greeting.

"I have done myself the honor," said De Vin, still smiling, as he entered and closed the door. "I hope I do not intrude?"

"Philip De Vin was always an intruder here," returned Dorlan Ray, knitting his brows.

"Ah! Monsieur Ray, 'was,' but not 'is.' Times have changed wonderfully since the loss of our Napoleon. The Commune has discovered in me something better than a common soldier—I am happy to say. I have some power now, *mon ami*, as you will see. It is many months since I called to see you. The last time, you ordered me from your rooms—you, the painter, who does not own 2,000 francs in the world—you ordered me from the house of M. Achefort. Is it not so? Ha! ha! ha! but I laugh—it was playful. But what for?—because I love Osalind and would marry her. *Ciel!* I could not well help it. How unhappy I have been. Now, I dare come again,"—the evil smile deepening till his teeth glistened between his lips—"and I have business with Monsieur Ray; I have a message for the beautiful Osalind."

"Your business with me; state it quickly, and begone. As for Osalind—"

"He can have no affairs with me, father," broke in the young girl.

"As you please, mademoiselle," with a mock bow. "But when you know the nature of the business and the message—Here, Monsieur Ray, is what brings me to you,"—extending a sealed parchment—"and this to you, *ma jolie* Osalind,"—reaching her something very small, something that glittered and shone as it fell from his fingers into her involuntarily outstretched palm.

The first was an official document; the last a ring—a very costly ring, set with diamonds of rare beauty and worth. He grinned peculiarly on the pair as he delivered the articles.

A throe, keen, biting and terrible, iced the young girl's veins as this ring of diamonds glittered in her hand; her eyes fastened incredulously on the jewel.

Ray had torn open the missive given him. In one second he had perused the contents, in another he crunched it spasmodically in his grasp, and turned on Philip De Vin.

"Miscreant!"

"Stay, monsieur. Look; your child."

For, in the brief space during which Ray scanned the parchment, De Vin passed quickly to Osalind's side, and whispered something in her ear. What he whispered was this:

"Behold, the ring of diamonds is returned. You will know, by it, that your gay lover, Franz Edouin, is either dead or faithless—for such was the understanding when you gave it to him. Who, now, is in the path of Philip De Vin?"

"One—my father!" faintly interrupted Osalind, and almost instantly swooned at his feet.

"Look; your child," said De Vin, pointing to her prostrate form.

Ray sprang forward and grasped her in his arms.

"Osalind!—my child! What is it?—speak!" And carrying her to a lounge, he turned again upon De Vin, his voice wavering with passion.

"It is well, Philip De Vin—well for your villainous schemes. This order for my arrest is your doing; its charges are lies. But there is a mistake. I swear, by Heaven! I have not left my studio for three days—"

"That must be proved, Monsieur Ray."

"To whom?"

"Whom? Who but Raoul Rigault? It is useless to tell me that you have not left your studio for three days; you were seen yesterday, you were heard to shout '*Vive la*'—But no matter; there are witnesses, and I am one. You see, Monsieur Ray, times are changed. Ha! ha! ha!—quite changed."

"Raoul Rigault!" echoed the artist; and at mention of the name, and at sound of the mocking laugh, he felt a shiver in every nerve.

Stronger men than Dorlan Ray have shuddered at the name of Raoul Rigault.

But a change came over the artist. His eyes lighted desperately, his cheeks burned; and the pistol he carried for Victor Bramont leaped as by magic to his hand.

"Vile plotter! not so well for you after all. Take that, Philip De Vin, and let the bloody Commune do its worst!"

Quick as was the movement, De Vin was not off his guard. His light saber flashed from its sheath, and the pistol went whirling through the air—the bullet thudding into the ceiling above them.

"*Parbleu!* be careful," he ejaculated, as his stout wrist circled the saber in a marvelous stroke.

"And now I am at your throat!" cried Ray, madly; and would have throttled De Vin, had he not sprung beyond reach.

"Beware, Monsieur L'Artiste! you anger me. Look at this!"

He flung open the door and clapped his hands. A squad of six soldiers appeared as if by conjury, ranging themselves against the wall, "dressing" before the door.

"Will you see this? Resist and I shall order them to shoot! Surrender, Monsieur Ray—and now you will answer for firing on an officer of the battalion of the 5th Arrondissement!"

"*Vive la Commune!*" howled the soldiers in chorus.

A moment he stared at Philip De Vin, at the glinting bayonets in the hall, at the scowling visages of the soldiery; his fury froze within him, and his face blanched. De Vin was, indeed, in earnest.

Earnest and villainous.

For the plot was plain: to tear the father from the child, and thus deprive her of shelter from a scoundrel's importunities.

We see that the Frenchman was, or had been, a suitor for the hand of the artist's daughter. How his suit was received is evident in the fact that, some months previous, Dorlan Ray had expelled him from the *conciagerie* of M. Achefort, and forbade him looking at, speaking to, or even thinking of lovely Osalind.

This, then, caused the arrest of Dorlan Ray, through the instigation, and to serve the ends of Philip De Vin, whose influence at headquarters was great, as may be discovered in the course of our narrative.

"You will surrender, Monsieur Ray?—or shall we have a little trouble?"

Ray sunk to his knees beside the still form on the lounge.

"Osalind! Osalind!" he groaned; "may God protect you now, for I am powerless."

De Vin clapped his hands again, and at the signal a *petite* French maid ran forward from the stairs, where she had been waiting his call.

"Give her good care," he said to the maid, and jerking a thumb toward the tableau at the lounge; then aloud: "Come, Monsieur Ray, the Prefect of Police wants to see you."

"Oh, Osalind! My poor Osalind!" cried the miserable father.

But Osalind heard neither the order of De Vin, nor the groans of Dorlan Ray. Her heart was stilled like unto death, by sight of the ring of diamonds, which plainly seemed to say, in being thus returned to her:

"Franz Edouin is no more to you!"

"Come, Monsieur Ray."

"No, no, no! My child!"

"She will be cared for by this girl," then mentally: "and by me." Then aloud again, sternly, as he tapped the artist on the shoulder: "Come, I say, and move quickly!"

The smile, the ironically-affable mien had vanished. The emissary of Raoul Rigault leveled his saber toward the door with a motion of command, and his brows knit darkly. Then he stamped one foot on the carpet.

"Your hat—your cape—come!"

"But it is so sudden," protested Ray, imploringly. "Give me till to-morrow with my child. See: she is unconscious. To wake and find me gone, no doubt to my death by the order of your fiend-master, Raoul Rigault—oh! what horror. Give me some time—"

"I obey the order of my superior. Come!"

"Philip De Vin!"

"If Monsieur Ray does not move fast—*parbleu!*—I shall have him dragged out by the neck!" snarled De Vin, losing patience.

He gave a glance, a sign, to his vassals, and two of these made as if to enter and lay hold upon the pleading prisoner.

"Stop. Keep off your minions—I will go!"

One fond glance at his unconscious and menaced child, and Dorlan Ray was marched off by the soldiers.

"By Heaven! you will meet retribution for this, Philip De Vin."

De Vin paid no attention. He looked toward the French maid, and shook one of his forefingers meaningly. To this she replied with a nod; and seeming satisfied, he followed the soldiers and their prisoner down the stairs.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as they emerged upon the street, "whence came that shot?"

For just then a pistol banged loudly, as if from the roof of the *conciergerie*.

"Forward!" he ordered, sharply; and as he strode along in the rear of the file, he mumbled: "So, now, I have the old father safely removed. What is to hinder my possessing Osalind—the rare and handsome Osalind? Ha!—again!" for a second pistol-shot broke the silence of the night, and a bullet whistled past his ear, flattening on the pavement at his feet.

"Parbleu! I shall be shot, presently, by that rogue in ambush. *Avancer!*"

Tramp, tramp, tramp went the soldiery. De Vin kept nigh his subordinates, in fear of another shot; and they disappeared in the darkness.

The vicinity of the three houses—that of M. Achefort, that of M. Epont, and that of Xlmo, the Voodoo—relapsed again to its atmosphere of desertion and murk.

But not for long.

Hardly had the officer vanished with his prisoner, when the still air was broken by the appearance and clatter of a cab.

It came swiftly, and dashed up to the gate in the wall before *Le Bibou*; it stopped with a jerk, and its door opened with a swing and quiver as if kicked from the inside.

As the driver sprang from his box, and as two figures moved hurriedly amid the shadows—these two carrying a third, a man who was bound hand and foot—a single cry issued on the night, a cry that was half curse, savage, curdling, cut short by a palm that smacked sudden and tight over the lips.

In a breath the cab drove off, and the heavy gate in the wall shut to with a rickety clang.

In a few minutes a light appeared at one of the windows—a brilliant red light that streamed over the wall and aslant the street; but it went out almost as soon as it was displayed.

As the red light vanished, a black-garbed female ran out of the house owned by M. Epont. She sped across to the gate, and shook its bars furiously. This female was followed by another, who also ran and who called, guardedly:

"Careful, madame; careful, or you will spoil all!"

There was a second stream of light from the owl's front of *Le Bibou*. It poured out of a window in the fourth story—a blue, ghastly glimmer—and was gone as suddenly as the first light.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF M. EPONT.

In the fourth story front or attic chamber, in the *conciergerie* of M. Epont—that is, the room corresponding exactly with and next to the studio of Dorian Ray—another scene was progressing at the moment when Philip De Vin presented his unwelcome person before the artist and his child.

A woman was striding rapidly to and fro across the carpet, greatly excited, and absorbed intensely with three letters—one in each hand and one between each hand—which she held and rustled under her gaze, as if endeavoring to read the three simultaneously, all very important, all the cause of her restlessness.

A woman of over forty years, but one of those samples of her sex who appear to develop more wonderfully at prime age, and whose figure had accumulated rather than lost its attractive symmetry. Tall, majestic—half English, half Spanish; a female of well-set beauty—her dark, keen eyes, her full yet rigid lips, the poise of the head, the firmness of step, all denoting determined character and experience with the world to teach the mind its true strength.

Such, in brief, was Helen Varcla, the actress; well known on the English and Parisian boards; had received bouquets at Berlin and applause at Dresden; was notorious and popular.

After a brief season in London she had engaged in Paris—that was two years prior to this night of her introduction to the reader; and during the past year her alternate coming and going to and from the attic rooms—which she had rented in the house of M. Epont immediately upon her arrival in Paris two years previous—were movements of mystery to all save her maid, Annette, who was left in charge of the rooms during the spasmodic disappearance of her mistress.

That Helen Varcla should have engaged apartments in a section of the city so disagreeably close to the vitiated and scummy localities of Belleville and Vilette—when she had money, eminence, *entree*, and could have selected a fashionable hotel for herself—was a matter of gossip to her sister professionals, who, despite her fame and the value of her acquaintance, were disinclined to visit her since her retirement from the stage, which occurred several months before the hoisting of the red flag on Place de la Bastille, Commune.

For this very reason Helen Varcla retained

the rooms in the house of M. Epont, No. — Rue de Lafayette; as other affairs than the chat of green-room associates engrossed her, and her life had become centered in a purpose revived after it had lain in her heart for eighteen years, burning now with double ardor.

And many who missed her most wondered at her strange seclusion; because she was Helen Varcla, and London managers were ready to importune her with offers of enormous salary.

Thus aloof was her life, close to herself, for about a year, and closer still during the past six months.

But the letters.

These three missives which we find her reading on the night of April—had reached her at about sunset, by special messenger of the parties sending: one from Rouen, one from Versailles, one within Paris itself.

Annette stood at a far side of the apartment, quietly watching her mistress. She knew the contents of the epistles, and was not surprised that they caused Helen Varcla much agitation.

We look at the letters. The first, as follows:

"ROUEN, April —.

"HELEN VARCLA:

"I am happy to say I have succeeded. Victor Bramont was at Havre four days ago—yesterday at Rouen. He is now gone. By a letter which I abstracted from his pocket, while jostling in a crowd, you may infer that his destination is Paris. *Vi e:*

"PARIS, Dec. —, 18—.

"Victor Bramont will find his prey in Paris, at No. — Rue de Lafayette. * * *

"This may be what you want. I hope so. And, awaiting your further orders, I am *SIGNO.*"

The second, as follows:

"VERSAILLES, April —.

"HELEN VARCLA:

"After great difficulty I send you this intelligence, for you may know it is neither easy to leave or to enter Paris, since the Official Journal of the Commune demanded a reign of terror and closed the gates.

"The point: Franz Edouin left here to day, by means and in a disguise known only to himself, for Paris. My messenger may not precede him a single hour. *SIGNO.*"

And the third, as follows:

"PARIS, 4 P. M.

"HELEN VARCLA:

"This is to advise you that Victor Bramont has reached Paris; that Franz Edouin has reached Paris. Watch the windows. If Victor Bramont comes first—a red light; if Franz Edouin—a blue light. * * *

The last signed with three stars, as if indicating that the writer might be identical with the author of the communication to Victor Bramont informing him that his "prey" was in Paris, and which was purloined by the scribbler of the first missive to the actress—who signed himself, or herself, whichever it was, "*SIGNO.*" the same as he or she of the second letter dated at Versailles.

And these, mutually, had aroused the excitement which possessed Helen Varcla, as she paced the carpet of the attic chamber—a hooded mantle thrown over her shoulders, as though about to enter the street.

Presently she refolded the letters and thrust them into her pocket.

"Come, Annette; to the roof. I fear something has happened. It is high time for Xlmo's signal. The delay chafes me. Come."

Passing into the adjoining apartment, she ascended a ladder which led to a low roof, and at the top of the loft—it was a roof that slanted, yet not so much as to prevent a person walking or crawling on it—a trap-door opening directly at the peak, accessible by a second ladder, where there was an extensive view by daylight.

Annette followed, producing a small but powerful spy-glass from her pocket. She climbed to the top of the ladder and looked forth—upon Paris: bloody, downfallen Paris, over whose giddy scenes of plots, strifes and ruin, hung a glimmering haze, like a luminous ether of death in the grim skies.

Helen Varcla, grasping one of the lower rounds, inquired:

"Do you see anything, Annette?"

"Yes; a light."

"Ha! what color, Annette?—the color?"

"It is in the west. I think something must be burning near the Arc de Triomphe."

"Pah! not that way. Look again."

"And I see another light toward the Hotel de Ville—"

"Do you wish to anger me?" interrupted Helen Varcla. "I care little if the Hotel de Ville is in ashes, or the Champs Elysees rivered in fire and corpses. Look across the street—look at *Le Bibou*. Do you see a light that way? Eh?"

"No, madame; all is darkness."

An impatient exclamation broke from the lips of the actress, and she shook the ladder spitefully.

"Hark, Annette! I thought I heard a pistol."

"And I. It must have been in the rooms of Monsieur Ray, the artist."

"My curses on Dorian Ray and all that is his!"

The shot they heard was that fired by the artist at the French officer. It sounded faintly through the walls, so faintly that they might

have mistaken the noise for else than it was: the fall or crash of a picture, perchance.

Nor was this the first time, since dark, that Helen Varcla and her maid had ascended to the trap-door in the peak of the roof. Thrice had they gone there, and thrice returned, disappointed, to the room below, after a long and vain watch for the expected signal, which, we know—by the contents of the third letter, and Helen's interrogation while the maid swept the horizon with her spy-glass—was to be either a red or a blue light displayed from the windows or in the direction of *Le Bibou*.

"What do you see now, Annette?" after a few moments.

"A very dim light, madame, from over the way."

"Ah! *Le Bibou.*"

"The upper part of the window is open; but I can make out nothing save the black painted walls and a skeleton's head, and a moving shadow—it moves slowly, madame, like somebody idly walking up and down, and whom I cannot catch a glimpse of."

"On the street, east or west, Annette!—is any one coming?"

"Not a soul. It is like the grave. Ah! there is another light."

"Another light!" echoed the actress, breathlessly.

Her suspense was overpowering as she stood at the feet of the maid, looking up in the gloom, asking questions; the hand on the ladder-round—its fingers glistening with gems—worked nervously on the wood, as if she gripped something hateful and which she desired to crush.

"People are coming from the house of M. Achefort, next door," said Annette. "The light from the hall plays on the wall and gate of *Le Bibou* and on the row of trees by the wall.—Oh, madame! I am hurt!" and with the last, she sunk suddenly down the ladder as if smitten with pain and fright.

A pistol had cracked—the first explosion that attracted De Vin, when he emerged from the house of M. Achefort with his prisoner—and instantaneously the small telescope flew from Annette's hands, far outward, as if stricken from her grasp by a lightning bolt.

Showing that whoever fired the shot had aimed at the maid, and the aim was nigh fatal.

"Annette! are you struck?" exclaimed Helen Varcla, supporting the girl.

"No, I am only frightened. But the bullet was close, for I felt its wind. I think it came from the roof of *Le Bibou*—"

"Fired by Zabach, no doubt. Xlmo told us to watch for the signal, but that did not mean we might spy through her windows with a telescope. Zabach is a good guard. He could easily have killed you—he only warned you. We will not tempt him further. But those people who are leaving the house of M. Achefort?—"

"Soldiers, madame; for I hear the rattle of bayonets, the clank of a sword, and their measured tread."

"Soldiers! Will we never be rid of this vandal military in Paris? I am sick of seeing uniformed rogues and epauletted assassins. Look forth, now, Annette; you need not fear Zabach."

As Annette obeyed, their ears were saluted by another whip-like crack, another pistol report; but this time its source was the adjoining roof, not a dozen feet from the trap, and she saw a man stretching over the eaves, looking after those who were departing from the house of M. Achefort.

She drew back in alarm.

"Madame! there is a man on the next roof. He fired at the people below. And now, as I watch him, he is crawling upward. He seems to be coming this way—"

"In with you, then, quickly. Hark! is not that the noise of a cab approaching?"

"Yes. A cab. I see it. It is almost—now it is here. It stops at *Le Bibou*. Now it is off again. Did you hear that cry, madame?"

Helen Varcla was gone from her maid's side almost before the latter had finished her speech.

She had heard the cry. It was a peculiar voice—desperate, angry, furious; and she had heard the same cry eighteen years before. Recognizing the accent, she half-echoed it with her own lips, but her tone was one of exultant triumph.

Hurriedly descending to her rooms, thence to the lower hall—jerking the hood over her head as she went—she flung wide the door, darted past the astonished keeper—and as she reached the street, the red transient light, mentioned in our previous chapter, shone at one of the windows of *Le Bibou*.

"It is Victor Bramont!" she exclaimed, noticing the light as she ran toward the gate in the wall opposite. "He is trapped first; Franz Edouin next!"—and here she reached the gate and shook its bars as we have seen. "Open! Open! Evils melt these irons. I cannot wait! I must be inside—"

"Careful, madame; careful, or you will spoil all!" admonished Annette, who was close behind her mistress. "Here is the bell. We will ring it, as Xlmo bade us do. But I very much fear you are too hasty. We were to wait until both Victor Bramont and Franz Edouin—"

"I care not. I must get in to Victor Bramont—the wretch! He has the link! He alone knows the secret that for seventeen years I have been mad to learn—he, my enemy, now in my power! I'll wring it from his lips, from his heart! Ha! h-a! we have him now. Seventeen years ago it was his turn, now it is mine! Let me in here! Open this gate!" and as she called aloud she rattled the bars, then grasped the brazen knob in the wall and wrenched it out its full length.

At the moment she pulled the bell, clamoring for admittance, the door of M. Achefort's house opened, and a man stepped out. The light from the entry flashed for a second on the two women, who recoiled as if they feared discovery—and recoiled again as a low, savage growl issued between the bars of the gate, and the bristly muzzle, sharp jaws and gleaming eyes of a monstrous dog startled them.

Simultaneously—almost ere the door on the opposite side was shut, and as they shrunk from the brute that snapped at them through the gate—there was a quick outcry and the clash of swords in combat.

"Assassins! Back there!" thundered a desperate voice.

"A mort! A mort!" snarled a rough chorus.

He who came from the house of M. Achefort had scarce taken a dozen steps to the west, when three burly figures set upon him from the surrounding shadows, coming from the east, and at his back.

One of these grappled him by the collar—to fall as if by the butcher's ax, for the solitary person was alert and rapid, and his fist shot outward with terrible precision.

"A mort! A mort!" they bellowed, and, with short swords, they attacked him front and rear.

He, too, was armed. A short sword leaped from beneath his cape, and he gave battle with a fury.

"A mort! A mort!" they shouted.

A terrific struggle. Three to one.

Back, slowly backward they forced him. They crossed the street—he laying about him in circles and cuts, already smarting with wounds, maddened to hopelessness by the odds. They were nearing the grim wall of *Le Bibou*. He would stand here at bay, and sell his life dearly. To escape or conquer was impossible; for plain it was that he handled his weapon poorly.

"Cowards!" he gasped, "why do you wish to murder me?"

"Surrender, then!" snapped one, making a fearful lunge.

Annette plucked at the mantle of her mistress. "Oh, madame! let us fly! We are in danger here."

But the actress seemed riveted and deaf.

"Mark how they press him, Annette!" she panted, in a singular excitement. "And see; he is no match for them. He grows weak. They are at him hard. He must be beaten in a few seconds more. Ha! now I shall help him!" and as she uttered the last, she sprang toward the combatants.

The beset man's heel had caught in an old wheel that lay on the pave; he stumbled, and the sword went hurtling from his hand.

With a cry, the ruffians dashed upon him.

But the sword that flew from the hand of the worsted man scarce touched the ground. A woman's form glided out of the darkness: something hissed in the air, and the foremost of the attacking trio went down, blurting an oath.

An unlooked-for antagonist confronted the remaining pair of rascals, and a new cry rose on the night:

"A mort! A bas assassins!"

Helen Varcla rushed upon them with the sword of the man who had stumbled and the sword of the man she had killed.

A sword in each hand, whirling, hissing, thrusting, parrying; and the way in which she beat them back, with the right hand and the left hand, showed that her wrists were of marvelous muscle, her perfect skill and ease of motion something more than mere stage practice.

"A bas assassins!" she cried again.

In lightning circles and crashing strokes her two weapons smote and rung on the guards of her surprised adversaries; with clenched teeth she harassed and pricked them, forcing them, foot by foot, away from the wall.

And while she fought she heard the voice of her maid, who screamed:

"Madame! this man is Franz Edouin!"

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF THE VOODOO.

We enter *Le Bibou* by the barred and spiked gate at the front, by a narrow doorway on a porch at the end of a broad, straight, cobbled path; we gain an entryway of confused light and darkness, at the extremity of which ascends a flight of stairs, balustraded with crape and banistered by a whitish wood carved to represent the bleached limb bones of dead men.

Half-way up these stairs, a turn to the right; then a short flight, and a little way beyond this second flight a door—a large and heavy door studded with rivets and surmounted by a calf's head, out of the crown of which burned a lamp-

wick of blue, flickering flame. Across the threshold of this massive door was the reception closet of Xlmo, the Voodoo.

A gaudily-furnished though small apartment, hung with remarkably fine pictures, tapestried; frescoed in gilt, at one side a pair of luxurious curtains, whose slight, wavy motion told of an archway leading to an additional recess dedicated to the private and infernal orgies of the witch-like owner of this mystery-dismal edifice.

The recess comprised a cube of twenty feet; its ceiling an allegory, with Ops, the shameless goddess, driving her lion-yoked chariot over the verdure of Eden. In one corner, Clotho, the youngest of the Fates, decked in her robe of many colors and wearing a diadem of twelve stars; in another corner the great red dragon, conqueror of the Fates; in the other corners, heads of Senoges, the phenix, the marimba, flying fish, battle-axes, maces, spears, swords, clubs—the whole in a mass of muddle lightened by garish hues.

A black cat perched on a tall, three-legged stool of black wood, and squirmed her tail slowly to and fro; an immense parrot chattered upon its standing-stick. In an ample hearth a fire blazed, filling the room with an odor not unpleasant to the sense, and over this fire, swinging and turning pendulum-like, hung a small caldron, hot, steaming, bubbling.

Beside the fire was an image of Typhon, carved in stone, his eyes aglare, his shape of fright, his fist aloft as if to sow the terror of his thousand perfidies; in front of the fire Xlmo, the Voodoo—sorceress, witch, doctress, whose fame at medicine was almost unearthly, whose clairvoyancy was a marvel to the credulous, and whose remarkable powers and wondrous deeds had just awakened the suspicious inquiry of the Government, when war convulsed France and drew attention from her for the time.

Her light brown skin was that of the Makololo; her visage was that of the thug of northern India. Her eyes were large, staring, glittering, like those of the satanic image beside the fireplace. Her kinky but long hair was deftly twisted and twined round fine wires, stiff and straight, and each lock tied at the end with scarlet ribbon. Her hands and fingers, long, slim, supple with strength, terminated in talon-like nails of pale pink, and in one claw-of-a-hand she held a knotty cane topped with a death's head.

She rocked from foot to foot, with arms extended outward at her sides, her eyes fixed upon the hissing, fuming pot, muttering, the while, a weird incantation. And the cat purred loud, the parrot screamed, the specters, goblins, demons and skulls on the surrounding walls seemed imbued with devilish animation:

"Boil! boil!" she sung.

"The fluid of death, from a fiery breath,
Deeds woe to the innocent gay;
The charms of health, the blisses of wealth,
Shall rob the soul of its clay.
The curse! the curse! and the poisoned sip,
The wine of Dua for sensual lip;
Drugged methueglin where foes may dine—
To kill and cure—both arts are mine."

"Oho! how it bubbles and bubbles. Ha!—a step. Who comes? So. How now, Zabach?"

The curtains were pushed aside, and a man appeared in haste; an African of unusual muscular development and stoic mien. A reasonable specimen of the bushman; his head shaved like an Arab, wearing a rumal and concha.

"A cab. It is near," he said, in tolerable English.

"Good," she answered, in like language.

"My emissaries work well. Listen."

There was a dull sound in the wall, like a single tap on a muffled drum.

"Yetu!" (one) exclaimed the hag.

Again the sound in the wall.

"Bitri!" (two) she uttered, quickly.

Again the tap.

"Sancod!" (three). "Admit them, Zabach; my *agueras* have brought Victor Bramont to me. Haste."

Zabach vanished quick and noiseless as a shadow.

Xlmo left her position at the hearth, and crossed the room, rubbing the death's-head cane between her hands and grinning gleefully.

In a few minutes there was a scuffle and scrape of feet in the direction of the ante-room; two men entered on a half-run, dragging between them a third man who struggled violently in their grasp and shouted fierce curses upon their murder-molded faces.

Forward they dragged him into the laboratory of the Voodoo—finally flinging him across, with a reel and a stumble, to bring up suddenly against the opposite wall with a bump that jarred his brains.

"*Sacre diable!*" he roared, in rage and pain.

"Kidnappers! cutthroats! Where have you brought me? Heh!"

He recoiled from the horribly-ciphered wall against which his nose had been pressed, shaking himself convulsively, as if he felt the painted snakes and reptiles crawling up his arms and round his neck; then he made a frantic dash at the draping curtains in the archway, to escape from the hideous place. But a strong paneling

had been shot into its recess, from sheaths in the side wall, and again his head received a severe thump as he came violently in contact with the unexpected obstruction to his exit.

"*Diable!*" he snarled. "What devil's den is this? I shall knock my brains out presently. Ho! villains. Let me out. *Sacre!* Open this abomination-of-a-door—do you hear? Ha! who spoke?"

During these few moments of rage at his incarceration the raving man had not seen Xlmo, who stood in the shadow of the niche formed by the flue above the hearth. Now, while he kicked with both feet, alternately, on the obstructing panel, the Voodoo emerged to the glare of light thrown out by the fire on the hearth, saying, as she slowly advanced:

"Victor Bramont, I have you at last!"

"Ha! who spoke?" he cried, turning sharp around.

"I—Xlmo, the Voodoo."

An instant he glared at her in uncertain silence. He turned pale, and his lips compressed beneath his long-ended mustache of jet until they were two livid streaks. His eyes, before flashing with anger, assumed a dull, sickly glance, and his whole frame appeared to be spitted, upright, to the floor.

Whatever might have been the terror occasioned by a thought that, in some way, he had offended the powerful and relentless Voodoo—of whose deep methods of vengeance many fearful tales were afloat—evidently, not this terror alone for the moment froze his pulse and shocked his quivering nerves; for instantly, upon beholding the ominous face, with its piercing, unwinking eyes, he thought:

"*Sacre diable!* If I mistake not, then I am undone. I have seen that face before. Where? Oh, in England! If not that face, a face so like it that this one seems to say: 'I told you I would not die, Victor Bramont; that I would live to kill you for trying to kill me!' If this is Xlmo, the Voodoo—of whose devilish juggleries I have often heard—then, Xlmo, the Voodoo, wonderfully resembles the nurse whom I struck dead with my dagger in the cellar of a certain house in England, seventeen years ago—"

"We have met before," interrupted the sorceress. "In Italy, Germany, India—have we not?"

"Also in England," Victor Bramont would have added, had he not remembered that, if Xlmo was the woman he supposed her to be, there were chances that she did not recognize him now as the man who had stabbed her when he and she bore other names.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Xlmo.

"Sorceress! yes!" he snarled, finding speech at last. "May you be strangled a thousand times! What am I here for? Let me get out! Will you cut these cursed ropes?" and he tugged furiously at the rope and stick which pinioned his arms. "*Sacre!* Cut me loose—do you hear?"—dancing and whirling about as if on a carpet of blazing spikes, and redoubling his efforts to break the binding rope.

"I say we have met before."

"Yes. *Sacre!* Let me out of this and we may meet again," he snorted.

"When Xlmo sends for anybody, they are sure to come—even to the cellar of a certain house in England. Eh, Victor Bramont?"

At this point the tapping in the wall, advising of some one desiring admittance below, sounded in the room.

"*Diable!*" muttered Bramont. "It is she. I must be loose now, and fight for my life!" Then aloud: "Why did you send for me? I shall get your throat between my fingers presently—hag! Eh? now I am free. Ha! ha!" and here, by a gigantic strain, he burst the ropes and flourished the stick menacingly aloft. "Command that door to open—sorceress!—or I'll beat you dead with this same stick."

"Not so fast, Victor Bramont—"

"Let me see about that. Be quick and command that door—*sacre!* Ho! my finger is gone!"

He fairly shouted the last in agony, for, having sprung madly toward the Voodoo, she leveled her death's-head cane full at the hand clenched on the upraised stick; there was a scarce perceptible concussion, a whiz and a thud, as a pea bullet from the air-gun—for such the cane was—clipped off the tip of one of Bramont's fingers and wrung forth that cry of pain and surprise.

"Beware of the Voodoo in her den," warned Xlmo.

"You have shot away my finger!"

"Next time it may be an ear or an eye."

"*Diable!*"

"I did not want you for butchery, Victor Bramont. This time you are not my captive. You came in answer to the note signed with three stars—came to pounce upon your prey; and your enemies have pounced upon you."

"You wrote the letter signed with three stars," he yelped, while he tried to stop the flow of blood from his wounded finger.

"I had another do it. But you are not my captive."

"Not yours? Good. Then you do not intend to make a meal of me—cannibal-sorceress!"

Xlmo chuckled low.

"I am a man again. But, whose captive am I—tell me that?"

"The captive of the worst enemy you have in the world."

"None worse than you," mumbled the entrapped man. And aloud: "Well, and what am I wanted for?—since I am safe from your hands and teeth. Eh?"

"You will, perhaps, die by her hand!"

"Her hand! It is a woman. Who—her name?"

"An actress of renown."

"*Sacre!* Helen Varcla! Bad as ever," inwardly exclaimed Victor Bramont. "I have seen this Helen Varcla many times, and every time with a shiver, because her face is like the face of a woman who, one night eighteen years ago, saw me poison the wife of Dorlan Ray, and whom I tried to strangle when she pursued me through the garden. That was strange, too, when she hated Dorlan Ray because she could not win his love. I always imagined that the reason she pursued me, to kill me in turn or deliver me to justice, was because she, herself, wanted the pleasure of poisoning the sick wife of Dorlan Ray, and—*sacre!*—I robbed her of that pleasure. What has this devil-Voodoo in common with Helen Varcla?"

"Helen Varcla has good cause to take your life, Victor Bramont, and so have I. You may be a dead man before morning."

"*Sacre!* You have brought me here to be strangled by Helen Varcla. A great mistake. Not while I have this stick. That popgun of yours cannot shoot twice. Before Helen Varcla arrives, I shall have the satisfaction of beating your plotting head into fragments. Now, then!"

Quick in the impulse of fury he rushed upon her, the stout stick flourished in his bleeding hand.

The black cat spat at him; the parrot swooped down with a screech and belabored him about the ears with its flapping wings.

Then another whine of rage and agony broke from the lips of Victor Bramont, as he recoiled, staggered, dropped the stick and clapped both hands to his eyes in helpless blindness. Xlmo had ejected a subtle powder from some contrivance between her lips, which instantly deprived him of sight.

"*Diable!*" he shrieked. "My eyes! They are out! Piece by piece she is killing me! I am to die the death of a dog!"

"Beware of the Voodoo in her den," warned Xlmo, a second time. "And now, Victor Bramont, backward you go—back! Into the pit, to await your visitor."

She advanced upon him, thumping him smartly about the head with her knotted stick, and forcing him to retreat across the room.

"Ho!" whined her victim, unable, in his blindness, to offer any resistance, though he essayed to lay hold upon the rapidly-circling cane. "Ho! I am to be tumbled into a pit. Leave off—sorceress! I shall one day pay back these blows—*sacre*, yes!"

"Back! Back you go. Helen Varcla will see you soon. She wants the link—the link you broke eighteen years ago, in the chamber of death, beside the corpse of the wife of Dorlan Ray. Back! Hah! now you go down—down—down!"

While she drove him thus, beating, thumping and pounding him with the death's head cane, a portion of the wall behind him—obedient to a spring, which she touched with the toe of her sandal—yawned and disclosed a narrow closet. In the direction of this closet she pressed him, and with a sudden push forced him into it. No sooner had his weight alighted inside than the interior of the aperture shot downward with its human burden.

"Down you go, Victor Bramont!" screamed Xlmo, over the edge of the black cavity. "Wait there until Helen Varcla comes."

"Helen Varcla is already here," said the voice of Zabach, who at that moment entered between the curtains.

Xlmo hurriedly closed the aperture in the wall.

"Hark!" added the African, raising one hand. The muffled drum-tap was heard in the wall.

"Two women are at the door. One is Helen Varcla."

"How could they pass Belial, my faithful dog?—he is ever hungry, and knows no one but Xlmo, his mistress, and Zabach, his master."

"I cannot answer. Hear: the signal."

The muffled tapping in the wall, this time a series of taps, sounding like a message of impatience.

"Helen Varcla is in too much haste," exclaimed the Voodoo. "But if she be alive in the yard, with Belial, my faithful, why, then, you may admit her."

Zabach hastened through the curtained archway, the panel to which had been moved aside. Xlmo crossed to the boiling pot and removed it from its hook.

"What can be the matter with my messengers?" she muttered, frowning thoughtfully. "Franz Edouin should be here, too, by now. Then all are together, except one—the link. Seventeen years seem long to wait for revenge. The hate of Helen Varcla never dies—"

"Man in the hole! Man in the hole!" squeaked the parrot, ogling his witch of a mistress.

"Silence, Pluto!" she snapped. "Ah!—footsteps. There must be several, judging by the noise."

The Voodoo stepped forward and drew aside the curtains.

Helen Varcla entered, followed by her maid, Annette. Behind Annette came two men—the same who had brought in Victor Bramont—carrying a man who was helplessly gagged and bound. In the rear of all stalked Zabach.

"What is this?" demanded Xlmo.

"It is I—Helen Varcla. But for me, your emissaries would have assassinated the man whose life is valuable to me for certain purposes. I have brought Franz Edouin."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ASSASSINS.

It is necessary to speak of a scene which transpired prior to the opening chapters of this narrative.

Evidently there was one person who was not subject to the rule of exclusiveness characteristic of the daily life of Dorlan Ray, the artist, and Osalind, his beautiful daughter; for, a few nights previous to the events already described, a certain scene of commingled happiness and sorrow was progressing within the house of M. Achefort, having much to do with incidents to be detailed hereafter.

At the furthest extremity of the entryway or passage which held the rooms rented by the artist, a tall, narrow window or casement opened out upon a stone balcony barely of sufficient size to contain two persons, fixed like an eagle's nest in its eyrie, and overlooking the high roofs of lower houses extending far away from the adjacent walls of a deep, dark, crooked court.

Standing within the balustrade of this secluded perch were a man and a maiden. His arms enfolded her in a fond embrace, and her head rested upon his shoulder with all the confidence of love.

"To be always with you, to dream that I am ever near you, dear Osalind," said the man, in a voice that seemed to be striving to soothe, "is a happiness too perfect to remain unbroken. Even living in such a boon, I would fear that some sad occurrence might, at last, tear us asunder forever. That I must leave you does but heighten my eagerness to be gone; for all the sooner may I return."

"How can you try me thus, dear Franz, with unreasonable philosophies?" returned the girl, clinging tighter to his form, while he drew his mantle about her shoulders—for Osalind Ray, as she reposed within the protecting caress of her lover, Franz Edouin, could not repress a shiver, which he attributed to the possible damp of the night, though, in reality, the sudden convulsion of the fair form was caused by a choked sob rising at thought of the coming separation.

"Few men, dear Osalind, are blessed by such a love as yours for me. See; this ring upon your finger. Its diamonds glow not more perpetual than my affection for you. Let me wear it till I return, to kiss upon and think of you."

She drew the ring of diamonds from her finger and held it toward him.

A magnificent ring whose gems, even in the dull, uncertain glimmer which pervaded the air of the stone balcony, sparkled and scintillated like the tiny stars of heaven, polished by the electric ether of a winter's eve.

"Dear Franz, I would not lose this ring for all the kingdom of my hopes. It once belonged to my sainted mother whom I never saw. When I feel despondent and weary with the struggles of a shadowed life, its glance has almost spoken words of comfort."

"And what has shadowed so rare and precious a life as yours?"

"That is for my father, some day, to tell you. The secret is not mine. But the ring, dear Franz: I invoke you, keep it safe."

"Can you doubt my love?"

"No—never."

"Then by that love I promise, when you shall see this ring out of my possession, you will know that Franz Edouin is no more to you—"

"No more to me!"

"Because I shall be dead—ah! I thought I heard a voice," and stepping quickly to the edge of the balustrade, he peered searchingly into the depths of the court.

For, as Franz Edouin made that vow not to part with the ring of diamonds, except in death, there had arisen from below a short-breathed, half hissed exclamation, the sound of which startled both lovers.

Had not the balcony projected so abruptly at the front and sides, the keen gaze Franz Edouin cast into the darkness would have discovered the window of the entryway directly beneath—which corresponded with that above, having likewise a stone balcony—and in this window, with one foot slightly advanced upon its balcony, stood a man who had been listening eagerly to catch the low-toned words of those overhead.

He was wrapped in a cloak and wore a large slouch hat, both of these effectually concealing his shape and identity; but the rich boots and spurs discernible under the cloak, and firmly

planted in that attitude of deep attention, betrayed the presence of an officer of high rank.

He had stood there like a specter for some time, but was not rewarded by his eavesdropping until Franz Edouin, in a louder tone, declared:

"When you shall see this ring out of my possession, you will know that Franz Edouin is no more to you." And immediately afterward: "Because I shall be dead."

Then broke from the lips of the listener that exclamation, the words of which were:

"*Parbleu!* Franz Edouin, you must die, then!"

"That voice," said the lover, again folding Osalind to him, "sounded wonderfully and unpleasantly near. It must have been some one passing in the court, who called to a companion; though I heard no footsteps. Let us return to your good father, dear Osalind. I have, also, to bid him farewell."

"Ah! how he loves you, Franz," murmured Osalind, as they left the balcony and moved toward the front of the building.

"It shall be my life's aim to prove myself worthy the love of two such lovable ones."

"And when will you return from Versailles?"

"That may be soon, dearest. My secret mission for the Imperialists shall not keep me long from you, depend."

They reached the door of the artist's studio, which was open. Glancing in, they saw Dorlan Ray busy by the light of numerous tapers, finishing a rare picture that was to be delivered on the morrow.

Anon the father of Osalind paused at his task, heaving a long-drawn sigh; and once, when he tipped the cup of a favorite flower with some glistening tinsel, to represent a fairy-tossed dew-drop gleaming in the light, a tear trickled down his cheek and fell upon the pallet that trembled in his fingers.

"It is like the waters of the soul," he uttered, lowly and with emotion, shaking his erst steady hand. "They flow where life seems brightest, when budding youth is sorrowful, to cheer and invigorate. Oh! that the countless tears I have shed for Osalind could revive her as even that artificial dew-drop perfects the beauty of that painted rose—"

"Father! you are weeping," cried Osalind, running to his side.

"Tush!"—endeavoring to displace her caressing arms, as if ashamed at being thus surprised in tears. "There, Osalind—there. I knew not that you were near. I fear that you have detained Franz Edouin too long. Ah! such love has deterred many a brave man from duty. You were to leave Paris, Franz Edouin, with the first shade of night; now you are at least two hours tardy. Bid him adieu, Osalind; he must away."

"Dear Franz! oh, how to part with you!" exclaimed the girl, rushing to the arms of her lover.

"Nay, we must part. Duty first, dear one—then love. Farewell, Dorlan Ray."

The two men fervently grasped hands, and their eyes met in a gaze that spoke of friendship strong and true.

"Dear boy, farewell. May Heaven guard you. One word; if, on your return, you find me not here, I charge you to protect my child. There is that upon my mind which I cannot explain now, for your leisure is brief; but it speaks of serious trouble. Remember, if harm comes to either her or me, its cause is a man, and that man's name is Victor Bramont."

"Victor Bramont—that hated name!" burst from Osalind, who drooped her lovely head and turned pale.

"Victor Bramont," repeated the lover, as if committing it safely to memory. "Be sure I shall not forget it."

"Now farewell."

Another pressure of hands and lips, and Franz Edouin was gone.

"Victor Bramont," he muttered, as he strode through the night, pulling his hat over his eyes and drawing his cloak tighter about him. "I shall remember it—yes—never fear. What harm can threaten my dear one through him? Short, indeed, will be my stay in Versailles. Why should I be sent there at all? So much for having become famous upon the detective force of Paris. Victor Bramont. True, as Osalind exclaimed: a 'hated name!' Harm or no harm, Victor Bramont, whoever he may be, is now my deadly enemy, because he is the enemy of my bride and of the father of my bride. Victor Bramont, beware—beware!"

Scarce a moment after the exit of Franz Edouin from the house of M. Achefort, the door opened a second time, and the figure that had played eavesdropper on the lower balcony stepped forth to the pave. He placed a small whistle to his lips and blew a low, clear note, which was repeated twice—three calls, a signal, which brought two men from the shadowy surrounding, running on tiptoe, like prowling cats, whose muscular bodies and vitiated faces might remind one of two strong leopards with the treachery of wolves.

"Hassim! Migo!" called the first figure. "Mark yonder man. His course is to Versailles. *Parbleu!* he must not reach it—and

if he does, must not come back. You understand me? Upon his finger is a ring—perchance several rings. A *louis d'or* for every ring. You hear? *Avant!*—quick, or you lose him."

Far down Rue de Lafayette strode the disappearing form of Franz Edouin, and close upon his heels sped the eager assassins.

Further still, at a corner, surged a mob of men and women, shouting and cursing vociferously. Toward this excited crowd Franz Edouin was rapidly walking, totally wrapt in thoughts of possible danger to his beloved, and heedless, apparently, of his own danger in deliberately mixing with the jostling, fighting mob. And that there was danger to him, personally, of all men in Paris, will be soon shown.

The riotous throng appeared to be clamoring for some one, or something, that had taken refuge, or was hidden, in a restaurant at one of the four corners. They had ignited a huge bonfire at the intersections of the streets, and were—part of them, mad with liquor—dancing and gyrating round the crackling flames, like demons let loose to make earth hideous, all the while shouting blasphemous demands for something or some one secreted within the besieged *cafe*.

The cries and hoots grew louder as Franz Edouin approached, though he dreamed not that his presence in the slightest degree was the cause.

The skulking figures that dogged Franz Edouin were fast closing up behind their intended victim. Cautious as rats, stealthy as goblins, like monkeys, they half walked, half ran, as they followed, carrying each a knife between his teeth; now on all-fours, to avoid being seen in a sudden glare, now stooping and leaping from shadow to shadow, now trotting on their toes as softly as if the hard pave was but a path of velvet.

The cloaked and hatted man who stood in the doorway of M. Achefort's house watched along the street with impatient interest, grasping and working his fingers upon the door-frame, while his black eyes, under the rim of his crunched hat, flashed wickedly. The light of the bonfire was beyond Franz Edouin, and his figure, and the figures of the two who trailed him, were thrown in bold relief before the vision of the man in the doorway.

"*Parbleu!*" he hissed, in exultant anticipation. "In that scene of Babel he will be killed, with none the wiser, nor to aid, if he called. It is good—very good. Ha! ha! Franz Edouin, I shall have the great pleasure to return that ring to mademoiselle—Hah! what is that? See! *Parbleu!*"

For just as the watching miscreant was congratulating himself upon the speedy assassination of the man whom he hated, a great red-blue wall of flame arose, roaring and seething, between Franz Edouin and his murderous pursuers, stretching from side to side across the street, and darting in zig-zag streams toward the two assassins, who, with a sharp cry of amazement and fear, turned and fled for their lives.

CHAPTER V. THE MOB.

UNCONSCIOUS of the fact that he was the cause of those additional cries which arose hideously from the swaying, surging, maddened mob congregated before the *cafe* at the corner, Franz Edouin was hurrying forward, bent upon accomplishing his important mission to Versailles—though his mind was solely absorbed, first, with his beloved Osalind; second, with Dorlan Ray's mysterious hint at coming trouble; and last, with Victor Bramont, the threatening cause of that trouble, for whom, each moment, his hate increased, although he had never heard of the latter until his name fell, first, from the lips of the artist, and afterward from the lips of Osalind, whose unmistakable tone of repugnance told plainly that it was not strange to her, and more, that even its utterance was dreaded.

Nor was he aroused from these unpleasant reflections until, having arrived in the full light of the blazing pile of fagots, barrels and conglomerated *debris*, he observed several men and women running toward him, while a roar louder than all previous roars savagely rent the air, and above the roar a man—a burly specimen of the Parisian bully—who was mounted upon a massive hogshead, yelled, with all the power of his coarse, hoarse throat:

"Seize that man, my friends! for it is Franz Edouin, the detective: and good cause many of us have to hate him. Ho! seize him!"

In obedience to this stentorian command those men and women were springing forward, followed by others eager to lay hold upon Franz Edouin, who, notwithstanding the screen of his ample cloak and hat, was easily recognized by the ruffian on the hogshead.

Foremost among those who approached him by leaps and jumps, was a man whom his diligent search of over six months had brought to trial for murder, and over whose head at that moment hung a sentence of death; following him a thief who had chopped off the hand of a brother, while that hand clutched a money-box of hard earnings; behind this second man, a

woman whose son he had brought to a life sentence for attempted outrage; and several besides these, of various crimes, all recognizable in an instant, by the broad rays of the monstrous bonfire, whose prison cells had been burst open by the frantic element of the Commune, and who now saw an opportunity to wreak murderous vengeance upon the man who was more or less instrumental in dragging their guilty bodies to justice.

"Death! Down with him!"

"Drown him in the canal!"

"Hang him!"

"Burn out his eyes!"

Another had recognized the detective. A face appeared at the panes of one of the *cafe* upper windows, and looked out to see the cause of the new uproar.

Then the window was thrown open, and the owner of the face shouted:

"Back, Franz Edouin! run for your very life!"—the face disappearing immediately—and none too soon, for clubs, stones and pistol bullets pelted around the window at once, and with such terrific hail, that not one atom of a pane of glass remained in the quivering sash.

"Ah!" muttered Franz, with a deep breath, "that is Jean Arnold, who served with me upon the detective force. A tried friend and true. These hounds have pursued him and now seek both our lives. Well may he warn me back. I am in a hornet's nest. It were madness for me to confront this crazy rabble. I must fly."

Availing himself of the momentary diversion occasioned by the scream from the man at the window, he turned to flee from his assailants, when that sheet of fire, alluded to at the close of our last chapter, arose as if by magic and cut off his retreat.

This wall of flame, seeming to arise from the bowels of the earth, which effectually barred the escape of Franz Edouin, and saved him at the same time from the daggers of the two assassins sent after him by the man who stood in the doorway of M. Achefort's house, was caused by the sudden combustion of many barrels of poor alcoholic liquor knocked open for drinking purposes and run to waste upon the smooth pave, until the street was wet as a lake and filled with noxious fumes, from the minute in which the mob captured the lower floor and cellars of the besieged *cafe*.

The scorching heat, the flying brands and showering sparks had at last lighted this liquid serial of streams, which spread rapidly over the street, and at the first ignition, which came like a dull explosion, Franz Edouin found himself hemmed by impassable fire in the rear and a mad mass of cutthroat men and snarling women in front, who clamored like the fiends of pandemonium for his life.

"Seize that man! It is Franz Edouin, the detective! Is not that enough to forfeit his body to our vengeance and his soul to Satan? Let him not escape you!" again howled the man on the hogshead.

"Death to Franz Edouin!" answered the mob.

"Down with all detectives!" and now a score pressed forward to aid in so desirable a capture.

While this was in progress, the man in the *cafe*, Jean Arnold—who was the original cause of this lawless assemblage, from the fact of their having been in pursuit of him—slipped unnoticed from a side door and mingled with the thickest of the crowd. But he was safely disguised by wearing a shabby suit of clothes, and having his face and hands discolored to the blackness of midnight, while round his head he wore a tight turban, and in his right hand he wielded a cimeter, all the time shouting, yelling, and seemingly anxious as the rest for the death of the sorely-beset detective.

At the time of which we write, and which will forever blot the fair fame of Imperial France, mobs were continual and everywhere and once started were quickly augmented to many hundreds of males and females bent upon pillage and murder. In this instance, the noise and din that floated resonantly from street to street soon gathered many more to the scene of tumult, who came pouring in squads from Rue du St. Martin, Place Roubaix, Boulevard du Magenta, and all the alleys and scums of surrounding neighborhoods.

Drawing a brace of pistols, and with a pistol in each hand, Franz Edouin backed into a narrow doorway, brave, desperate and almost hopeless.

"Come on, then, snarling whelps!" he hallooed, loudly. "Since I cannot run, I will fight; and before I fall, I shall build a rampart of dead men round me high and strong as the front of Mont Valerian. Dogs of riot! come on!"

The pistols cracked and frenzied yells were mingled with oaths that made Bedlam of the now luminous night, and told of mortal agonies.

Then another cry arose, and the attention of those who danced their orgies round the bonfire, turned to a narrow street leading, with a turn, to Quai Louis.

"The Death-cart! The Death-cart! Pierre Plaque, with his death-cart!" was the cry that, for an instant, caused a lull in the attack upon Franz Edouin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH-CART.

THE Death-cart of Pierre Plaque came gliding noiselessly along at full speed, a lean black horse stretching his lank legs in a breakneck trot, as if to cut a path directly through the closely-packed humans crowding ahead.

This vehicle was painted entirely black and highly polished, mounted on two tall black wheels having long, thin spokes and broad tires; the top of the affair being open and tilted toward the rear, like an ordinary cart. Inside was a stool also black; across the front a black plank seat; and on this seat sat Pierre Plaque holding and jerking a pair of black reins that terminated, amid a profusion of plain black harness, at the curb of a black bit.

Pierre Plaque wore a cone-shaped soft woolen cap of black, which dangled and bobbed behind in an immense ball-button. He wore no coat, but a black vest flapped open, and under the vest a black cloth shirt buttoned tight up in the throat. His skinny legs, in black, shrunken pants, were drawn up until his heels pressed the front-board of the cart and his toes projected like two spear-points. His fingers, with arms extended, twined, like a bunch of bleached eels, even fiercely round the reins. One eye, from the effect of a deep scar thereon, was widely distended and seemed to look far to the front; the other eye, small, keen and shrewd, appeared to take in every object near. His forehead was high, nose hooked, chin disfigured by a monstrous wart, and this wart danced up and down as his cadaverous mouth opened and shut, while he screamed shrilly:

"Make way, there! make way! Where is Jean Arnold, the detective?"

Coming thus suddenly and unexpected, and so grotesque in appearance, and as if from the center of the flames that a few seconds past had deluged the air with heat, smoke and smell—for these flames were now panting themselves out—Pierre Plaque reminded one of a diminutive devil rising, with skip and scud, from the regions of perdition, whose brimstone fires he breathed and lived in.

But the swift, noiseless black Death cart, and the ogling one eye of the shriveled driver crouched upon the seat, at once betrayed the familiar presence of this recent introduction by order of General Cluseret, and the words with which the ugly anatomy greeted the mass of men and women, were taken up and echoed ferociously.

"Where is Jean Arnold, the detective? Bring him out that we may strangle him!"

"Hold hard, Pierre Plaque!" cried the burly fellow who had figured upon the hogshead, checking the snorting horse by a gripe that nearly threw the animal backward. "Hold! there is time enough for Jean Arnold—"

"But you were right on his heels—he could not get away!" squealed Pierre Plaque.

"True. He is now in that abominable restaurant, which we shall presently tear to the ground if he does not come out—"

At this juncture the disguised negro wearing the turban and carrying the cimeter, who happened near the Death-cart, when it stopped, flourished his weapon aloft, and shouted:

"Death to Jean Arnold! Down with the detective!" which was repeated by a hundred screeching throats.

"We have caught another as good," continued the burly Frenchman, who maintained his hold upon the bit while he spoke with Pierre Plaque.

"Oho! 'another as good'!" echoed the Death-cart driver, cracking his knuckles in evident glee; then he stood up on the seat, rubbing the sides of his hooked nose with thumb and finger, and casting his small, keen one eye hither and thither, as if in search of the "other as good."

"Who is he? Where is he? We shall have him in my Death-cart in a trice, and take him a jolly ride before we spike his head on one of the barricades. Oho! by the bones of the catacombs! I see—you have not got him yet." And then for the first time he noticed the body of men surging before the doorway, heard the pistol-shots of the assailed detective, and the sullen murmur that demanded vengeance on Franz Edouin.

Franz had not been idle. His revolvers, of finest American make, were belching to the right and to the left, and several dead bodies were strewn prone around him, as if, indeed, he would carry out his threat to build a rampart of corpses as high and as strong as the front of Mont Valerian.

"Hoh—o!" piped the Death-cart driver, now beginning to caper in excitement. "Franz Edouin is a good catch. At him, my brothers! Mind not those little barkers. Hand him up to me. I have heard much of but never saw this redoubtable Franz Edouin. Capture him, by all means. Now then—now then—at him all! Ha! ha!"

Franz had emptied the last chamber of his weapons and now grasped them by the barrels to use as billies. But a score of bloodthirsty men were upon him ere he could strike a blow, and he was pressed to the earth by an overwhelming mass who struck, kicked and belabored him so

severely that his immediate death seemed imminent.

"Save him for me!" shrieked Pierre Plaque, rising on tiptoe, and sawing the air with his attenuated arms. "Save his life. Get him into the Death-cart!"

In answer to the loud cries and frantic gestures of the Death-cart driver, the burly Frenchman left the horse's head, and was elbowing, squeezing, fighting his way toward the prostrate form of Franz Edouin; his huge fists ascending and falling, sawing and hammering in mighty sweeps and rib-digging pokes, until, reaching the doorway and standing astraddle of the fallen man, he bellowed:

"Stand back all! Come within reach of these big paws, and I will mash your heads like so many grapes in a wine-press. Keep back—you hear? We want this man for the Death-cart of Pierre Plaque; afterward, you may hang, drown or shoot him, as you please."

Partly awed by the brawny arms and scowling visage of the gigantic rascal—who was a most popular leader of this particular riot—and tickled with the idea of riding the detective through the streets of Paris in Pierre Plaque's Death-cart, the mob, swayed by both inducements, howled, with one voice:

"Yes! Into the Death-cart with this detestable detective! In with him! And afterward we may shoot, drown, hang or strangle him. Live Pierre Plaque!"

Unfortunate Franz Edouin heard these cries and thanked Heaven that even a few moments more of life were left to him. Braised from head to sole, he was not yet insensible, but, at the time, unable to speak or rise.

"Toss him over here!" called Pierre Plaque. "By the old bones of the catacombs! we shall give him a ride, then build a guillotine with—Ha! the very thing!"—crying the supposed negro and the cimeter he carried. "The very thing! Come here with that sword of yours. It will fashion a guillotine to cut off the head of this miserable detective!"

At one bound the black fellow leaped into the cart, saying, willingly:

"Ay, Master Plaque, we'll ride him first in the Death-cart, and then cut off his dog of a head. Bravo! Bring us the detective!"—the last to the French ruffian who, half supporting Franz Edouin, whose arms were pinioned, was now forcing the victim forward.

When seated helplessly upon the stool within the dreaded Death-cart, the very soul of Franz Edouin recoiled, and a shiver like the ice of death convulsed his frame. He saw no mercy in his captors, and therefore shut his eyes upon the whirling scene.

He had heard of Pierre Plaque's Death-cart. By General Cluseret's orders it had been made, and to serve the malice of certain underlings of the Commune it was frequently used. It had hauled several wretched men from the *Depot des Condamnes*, *Muzas*, and other prisons, to destinations as yet unknown to the thieves, felons and lesser desperadoes and viragoes then ruling and running Paris, and any one once riding behind Pierre Plaque, in his somber vehicle, was never seen nor heard of again. Quite soon, therefore, the conveyance was known by every one in the city as a veritable Death-cart. But Franz Edouin had never till now beheld the dried, shriveled, vindictive driver of the Death-cart, for only with the uprise and devastating horrors of the red-flagged Commune had Pierre suddenly sprung from obscurity to notoriety, winning for himself a name of malicious cruelty.

Nor had Pierre Plaque ever beheld Franz Edouin, though having heard of his famous exploits in the role of a detective, and now that he had this noted personage in his cart, with the prospect of seeing him speedily beheaded, he stooped and bent his ugly little shape, and peered, with his still uglier face, into the countenance of the captive. Then, at one glance, he started back as if he had seen a ghost.

"Oho! that face!" he sputtered, in English. "By the bones of the catacombs! I have seen it before. But that I saw a certain woman die—and she was poisoned, I believe—in a certain house in England, I would swear that this Franz Edouin is that same woman in disguise. It can not be, though, for I am sure I saw her die. Yet what a strange resemblance."

It must be stated here that Franz Edouin, though tall and finely developed, muscular and brave, had a smooth, effeminate face, made more so by the long, loose brown curls hanging disheveled full below his coat collar. With his eyes now closed to shut out the horribly suggestive tumult surrounding him, and his usual stern and flashing glance hidden, this womanly appearance was more striking than ever, and forcibly reminded Pierre Plaque of some one he had seen poisoned to death.

"Come—be jogging along there!" growled the ruffian Frenchman, jumping from the cart and slapping the horse with his open palm.

Plaque slid onto his seat and gave the reins a violent jerk. Away went the cart, with the crowd on either side, hooting like demons and throwing both epithets and missiles at their captive. The supposed negro stood behind the prisoner, over whose head the cimeter flourished

anon in gleaming circles, threatening to decapitate him with each sweep.

As they moved ahead amid the cries, howls, screams and yelps of the insane throng, some of whom carried torches and blazing brands, Pierre Plaque continued to mutter to himself, in the English language:

"How strange! What a resemblance! Who can he be? so like the woman I saw die dead, dead, dead, in England, years ago. But be he whoever he is, he is now in my Death-cart, and that is the last of him; for whoso rides on that stool back there, rides to his or her death. So I shall bother my brains no more about him."

As Franz Edouin was thus being borne along to a doom he dared not imagine how horrible, feeling that naught but a miracle could save him, and still keeping his eyes closed upon the bickering mob, he became aware that a strong hand was gripping and pinching him upon the shoulder, as if by way of a signal. Presently his veins thrilled, as a low-toned familiar voice uttered in his ear:

"Have hope, Franz. The course is toward one of our Bureaus of *Commissaire de Police*; even now the red square lantern is in sight, and these murderers have no heed which way we go. I have a sharp and ready blade to cut your thongs. When I give the word—by crying into your ear the word 'Now'—we must leap for it and run into the Bureau. Do not forget the signal."

"Jean Arnold!" exclaimed Franz, in the same guarded tone and without turning his head. "How, under Heaven, are you here at my side and unharmed?"

Jean Arnold was silent. He already feared that his brief communication with the prisoner had been observed, for Pierre Plaque was at that moment gazing intently at the supposed negro, with his small, keen one eye, seeming to have scented or discovered something suspicious.

CHAPTER VII. THE ESCAPE.

THE mob was now approaching one of those Bureaus of *Commissaire de Police* which abound at convenient points in Paris, where persons may lodge complaints or seek information of lost or stolen articles, and generally obtain satisfaction, for the reason that the *Gardiens de Paris*, local and imperial, were alike in being everywhere and among all classes, high and low, to such perfect extent, and in such cunning disguises, as rendered any task in their line of duty comparatively easy to perform.

While Franz Edouin gave himself to hope that he might escape—stealing a covert glance at the lantern ahead and keeping his ears alert for the expected signal—Pierre Plaque was neglecting his horse, allowing it to pick its own way, and was keenly scrutinizing the supposed negro, his second companion in the Death-cart.

In the jostling, squeezing and rubbing of many bodies, the lampblack which made Jean Arnold appear to be a very black negro had been scraped upon his face, and, unknown to him, there was a great white smear on one cheek, betraying the true color of the skin beneath.

Pierre Plaque, casting a look over his shoulder to make sure of the safety of his prisoner, had been arrested by the too-vehement behavior of the negro, and at once observed that white smear on the latter's cheek. Having now an opportunity to scan more closely the features of the man he imagined was a genuine negro, and aided by the blazing brands and torches of the mob, he saw that the smear was neither paint, chalk nor dirt, but that the owner of the black face wore a white skin under it.

"Oho! my lark," thought the Death-cart driver, turning his gaze in another direction, that the supposed negro might not have a suspicion of his discovery. "Aha! my bird. I have two whites in my cart. One is masquerading. What for? Am I blind? Oh, no. One stroke of that cimeter, and Franz Edouin, this rat-of-a-detective, is free. A friend who runs this risk to save him. A bold friend. I see. Ha! ha!"—a low chuckle—"Now I shall give them both to this thirsty rabble. Not a rib nor a nail will they leave. Let me show my masquerading fellow a trick. I will take this street ahead. Hello, there!"—in his loud, cracked voice—"turn to the right."

"Turn to the right!" passed from mouth to mouth above the din of voices.

During Pierre's discovery that he had two white men in his cart instead of one, he had permitted his horse to walk, while the mob, on a half-run, kept forging ahead; so that by the time the corner was reached—which was but a few yards from the Bureau of the *Commissaire de Police*—scarce a dozen remained around and behind the prisoner in the Death-cart.

"This bit of information," chuckled Pierre, "I shall keep for the rabble until we are at the spot of execution. Then we shall have a double exhibition. By the bones of the catacombs! it will be sport—rare sport. Oho!"

He was cut short by a sudden and shrill voice in his rear. The voice cried:

"Now!"

And simultaneously Pierre Plaque was knocked headforemost from his seat, falling under the

wheels of the cart, which passed over him and wrung forth a squeal almost unearthly in its agony.

The cimeter of Jean Arnold cut the bonds of Franz Edouin, and the latter, armed with a sharp, long dagger, followed his friend in a quick, irresistible assault upon the few of the mob who were yet in the vicinity of the Death-cart.

This attack, with cimeter and dagger, both keen, well-handled and unsparing—the opposing ruffians having nothing but frail sticks and half-burnt brands with which to defend themselves—not only overwhelmed them with surprise, but laid many of them bleeding on the pave, and cleared a path for escape ere the painful screams of Pierre Plaque, or the angry chorus of others for help could apprise the great body of the mob of what was transpiring.

"Quick, Franz Edouin!" called Jean. "Look! The door of the Bureau is opened for us, and they are barring the iron doors for defense."

At the moment when the mob drew near there were a score of *Gardiens de Paris* congregated in the Bureau, and a few had come out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. It happened that those assembled had not yet cast their destinies with the Commune notwithstanding that new power had proclaimed itself the champion of individual liberty, the rights of conscience and the energy of order; in fact, were on this night debating the wisdom of such a course, as a premise to final action. Not yet being identified either way, and recognizing a part of the destructive element of the Commune in the approaching crowd of rough, fiend-like men and women, and perceiving the Death-cart, with whose brief and abominable record they were both familiar and disgusted, they were even on the point of charging the mob—though it might have required the whole four thousand five hundred police of Paris to disperse them—when the two men made that bold dash for liberty which excited the admiration of lookers-on, and caused many to cry, encouragingly:

"Hollo! this way. Make haste!"

Others, foreseeing an attack upon the Bureau, as a result of sheltering the two fleeing men, sprung to double bolt and bar the heavy windows.

In fewer seconds than it requires to tell it, Franz Edouin and his friend, panting and exhausted, were safe behind the massive door, against which rattled and railed the impotent bullets, stones and chagrin oaths of the infuriated mob.

"Jean Arnold, I owe you my life."

"There, friend; you would have done the same for me. Hark! something fresh is happening without."

The disappointed mob, bent upon forcing an entrance, and replying in like to the pistol-shots poured upon them from the upper windows, failed to perceive a body of horsemen that swept into the street at a gallop round a distant block. The first appraisal they had of the new-comers was when a hundred sabers flashed from their sheaths and dropped to head-level as a bugle-blast ordered the charge.

"The National Guard! Take care!—the National Guard!" yelled the panic-stricken rioters, who broke and fled precipitately.

Slashing thuds and groans of death mingled with hearty oaths where a sudden jam was mistaken for a rally of resistance; thundering hoofs and ringing steel bore down the fleeing horde.

Then a saber hilt rapped at the Bureau door, and a voice commanded:

"Open to the National Guard!"

General Cluseret, during his brief career as Delegate of War, was too shrewd a soldier to care to lose the four thousand five hundred trained police of Paris in the coming struggle, and this detachment of the Guard, which arrived so opportunely, had been dispatched to ascertain the sentiment of this particular prefecture, and make prisoners such as were antagonistic to the Commune.

While the Guards were routing the mob, Franz Edouin and Jean Arnold were making their way to the rear of the building.

"This unfortunate affair has delayed me several hours," remarked Jean, as they emerged upon an alleyway where all was still and dark, and nothing but the rumbling explosion of big guns at the west of Paris broke the silence of the night.

After so much noise and excitement, the precinct of this deserted alley seemed like the recess of a grave.

"Delayed you in what, friend Jean?" questioned Franz, glancing about him as if fearful of the presence of some lurking spy of the mob.

"I was intrusted, at sunset, with a dispatch from Cluseret to the Assembly at Versailles, being instructed to return by daylight. I will now have a hard ride of it."

"To Versailles!" exclaimed Franz. "Why, it is my very direction."

The message intrusted to Jean Arnold was a notification from the Executive Committee, over the signature of Cluseret, treating for a suspension of arms at Neuilly, that the old men, women and children, non-combatants, who had lived and starved for weeks in cellars, might be permitted to enter Paris. This first messenger

never reached his destination, which may explain, partly, why, on the appointed morning, the Versailles were supposed to have violated a sacred armistice by continuing the cannonade from Mont Valerian and other batteries.

"How happened it, friend Jean," continued Franz Edouin, "that you are cast so soon and willingly with the Commune?"

"Unhappily so, you may add. Ah! it was my brain to the rescue of my neck. I could not avoid it"—and Jean sighed deeply, as he paused at a drinking trough to wash the black stain from his face.

"Your true sympathies, then, friend Jean, are not with these—"

"Butchers?—no. Alas, poor France. Who shall rebuild thy glories, since our Napoleon is gone? Hist! was not that some one moving in the shadow there?"

"Perhaps a cat. The interest is at the front of the Bureau. No one would come here. Dear friend, I too, am bound for Versailles. In your true ear I may whisper: certain Imperialists, ready to avail of anything that will relieve Paris of this horrid Commune, have intrusted me with information hitherto known only to the emperor himself, and which will afford vast assistance to the Versailles. Thiers is now in Saxony. When he returns, and our approaches are complete, that wonderful man will make known his plans, which, all feel, are to restore law and quiet to our now bloody streets, even though his government be obnoxious to many. In my jaw I wear a hollow tooth, and in that tooth I carry a cipher of the information I speak of. Come—to Versailles! We go together."

As they left the alley a small, wriggling figure crept forward and stole after them round the fence-wall. Even in the thick gloom of the alley it was impossible to mistake the ugly little shape of Pierre Plaque, the Death-cart driver. Among the first to save his precious neck, when the detachment of the Guard charged the mob, he had turned the near corner and darted into the dark alley, just in time to shelter himself from discovery by Franz Edouin and Jean Arnold, as the two came from the rear door of the Bureau.

"A merry pair!" he gibbered, rubbing his fingers over and over, like a squirrel nibbling a nut. "To Versailles, eh? He has a hollow tooth in his jaw. Franz Edouin, then, is a confirmed spy against the Commune. Oho! my birds. But you may not reach Versailles. I owe you for these half-crunched ribs, my friend with the black face. By the bones of the catacombs! I thought myself a dead man when that wheel sawed across my stomach. We shall see whether you reach Versailles. A gay pair, forsooth!"

Within an hour two men, fully armed, were galloping for a less frequented road to the southwest of Paris, pausing only to exhibit passports, then dashing on again at full speed.

Not far in the rear of these two riders—and noiseless save for the rattling strokes of horse-hoofs—sped the Death-cart of Pierre Plaque in hot pursuit. The beast's ears lay flat to his head, and his tail flowed straight in the wind. No whip nor spur was needed, but the voice of the impatient driver caused him to leap like a hound on a fox's trail. Pierre Plaque drove a wonderful horse. The horse, cart and driver being well known no time was lost in stopping for passports or passwords, and he was steadily gaining upon the two horsemen.

Two men accompanied Pierre Plaque, and, as if by a devilish chance, they were the same who had been missioned, by the man in the doorway of M. Achefort's house, to follow and assassinate Franz Edouin.

"I have heard it said," grumbled one of the assassins, "that who so rides in the Death-cart of Pierre Plaque, that is the last of him or her. I hope the saying may not come true for us, comrade."

"*Mon Dieu!* I could not afford it. For, in case we do not succeed in killing this man we are after—who is Franz Edouin, the famous detective, and for whose death Monsieur De Vin will pay well—I have another task to perform, which is, to advise Helen Varcla, the actress, of the hour when he returns to Paris, for which notification she, also, will pay well. I think that Helen Varcla owes him a grudge, though she expressly said: 'Do not kill this man, but watch him for me.' Pietro, our comrade, is at Rouen on a similar mission—watching a man for Helen Varcla. Whether we kill Franz Edouin or not, I am sure of a reward; and you, my brother, can share it with me."

"I like that. Good. We have two chances." Pierre Plaque paid no heed to this conversation. His keen, small, one eye glanced eagerly ahead, while he urged on his galloping horse; and only once he squeaked:

"If we can catch them before they reach the cross-road they will never reach Versailles."

"And why the cross-road, Pierre?" asked one.

"You are a grand fool! They will have the army of the Versailles to back them. See! there is the cross-road, and now we are within a hundred feet of the rascals. Ha! get your weapons ready."

Saying which, Pierre Plaque drew from his

belt a monstrous pistol carrying a bullet as heavy as a rifle-ball. Evidently, the Death-cart driver was no coward, withal his sly, wicked, calculating nature.

Presently the night air reverberated with the loud crack of the pistol, and a hissing messenger of death sped toward the fleeing horsemen. Simultaneously sounded a cry of agony from a man's lips and a snort from a mortally wounded horse. The large bullet had done a double deed.

There was a stumble, a struggle and a cloud of dust.

Into this cloud of dust plunged Pierre Plaque, for he could not check his racing beast. Over and into a horse and man went the Death-cart and its occupants, turning a summerset and crashing to the ground in a wild, wrecked, jumbled mass, making thicker the cloud of dust that enveloped a scene of murder and quick retribution.

Only two living forms at last extricated themselves from the tangle of accident and death; one the horse of Pierre Plaque; the other one of the assassins—the one who had spoken of a bargain with Helen Varcla, the actress, as also one with Monsieur De Vin.

"*Mon Dieu!*" groaned the wretch, feeling his bones, to see if he was really unhurt. "Everybody is dead, I think; the horse, the other man, Pierre Plaque and my comrade. Ha! a thought. I must reach Versailles. Somebody, no doubt, will find these dead bodies and bury them. I have no time for grave-digging. I must go on to Versailles after Franz Edouin; for I perceive that the one Pierre Plaque has shot is not Franz Edouin. Now I am off again. I must either kill Franz Edouin, or get the ring he wears, or let Helen Varcla know when he returns to Paris. How she knew that he would leave Paris is a secret of her own."

While speaking thus aloud he had caught the black horse, stripped everything from him except the bridle and check-rein, and then bounding upon the animal's bare back dug his heels into the panting ribs.

Far down the road a single horseman, now nearly lost to view, was galloping rapidly toward Versailles, and on went the lucky assassin in hot chase, heedless of occasional shots from ambushed pickets by the roadside.

"On to Versailles! On to Versailles!" he spluttered and gasped; and with every word he gave the mad horse another dig with his heels.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RING OF DIAMONDS.

It was true that the brave Jean Arnold, who endangered his own life to save Franz Edouin, and who bore on his person a dispatch from the Committee to the Versailles Assembly treating for the relief of men, women and children at Neuilly, had received his death-wound at the hand of Pierre Plaque.

Pierre Plaque was not killed in that sudden and total wreck of the Death-cart, but severely stunned, and for a long time unconscious. Recovering his senses, and satisfying himself that the extent of his injury was a sprained wrist, he sat up, with legs crossed tailor-wise, and in some bewilderment contemplated the situation.

He saw his cart, utterly demolished; then he saw the dead man and horse on one side, and the dead assassin on the other side, and with all his brutish courage he sprang quick, and with a cold shiver to his feet, as if he had seen the hands of the two dead men outstretched to grapple him, while their ghastly lips cried:

"Pierre Plaque, you have murdered us! Now, on this lonely road, we will catch you by the throat and squeeze the wind out of your ugly body!"

He also noticed the absence of his favorite black horse and the second assassin. Turning his back upon the ghastly heap in the road, he walked swiftly toward Paris, occasionally casting a frightened look over his shoulder—for Pierre was more afraid of a dead man than a live man in that solitary place—and anon muttering his wrath against the fellow who, he supposed, had stolen his horse.

Franz Edouin eluded the pursuit of the surviving assassin, and reached Versailles in ample time to deliver the message of cipher to one of the members of the Assembly, that it might be brought forward for consideration in secret session on the following morning.

Being provided with passes that enabled him to come and go, with some caution, between Paris and Versailles, or to any point in either city—excepting where factions of riot disputed every authority—and having acquitted himself of his especial duty, he made his way to a secluded room to which he retired as the clock was striking two.

"Adventurous night!" he mused, before kneeling to thank his God for the life that had been so generously preserved to him. "More like a fable of terrors than facts of peril. All so quick, so strange, so horrible. Poor Jean Arnold, my brave, noble friend. I fancied that I heard the bullet strike his very bone; and never shall I forget his awful scream of pain. 'Mind me not!' he said, when I would have paused to succor him. 'On, Franz Edouin! On, to your duty!' Then he fell, both he and the horse."

But that I bore a precious message having to do with the fate of Paris, I would have stayed to avenge that shot. Pray Heaven I may soon meet and know his murderer. Farewell, Jean Arnold; for I feel that you are, indeed, dead. Another martyr to the consequences of the horrid Commune."

For cogent reasons, considering the dangerous nature of his dealings with the Versailles while still maintaining liberty of movement in Paris, Franz Edouin continued in the seclusion of his room during the following day. At night he walked forth, drawing and crumpling down his hat and muffling his cloak about him to conceal his identity, for the detective life he had led made him well known to many of the Versailles.

Directly beneath and in the downward shadow of a street-lamp, he paused with folded arms. His thoughts were of Osalind, and of the disagreeable name of Victor Bramont. So intense was this meditation that he did not perceive a skulking figure approaching at his back. For an hour this figure had been following him like a very specter; now it drew near, and its face—the face of a wolfish man—broadened with a diabolical grin of anticipation, the right hand clutched a poniard, and the lips muttered:

"I think I have you now, Franz Edouin; and since the reward of Monsieur De Vin, for your death, exceeds that of Helen Varcla, for your life, I shall at once make an end of you. Hear. He is talking to himself."

Franz was murmuring aloud:

"My business being over with the Assembly, I shall return to Paris to-morrow night. I cannot tarry away from Osalind when I know that danger of some kind at this moment threatens her."

Nearer crept the stealthy, stooping figure behind him.

"What can be the strange secret which so disturbs the father and the daughter?" continued Franz, unconscious of his danger. "Hated Victor Bramont, whoever you are! if I could meet you, one of us should perish at the pistol muzzle. Fear not, Osalind"—turning to continue his walk; and in the same breath: "Ha! not yet, assassin!" The movement had saved his life.

The bright blade of a poniard descended and sunk into the thick folds of his cloak between the body and the arm, and instantly the wretch who aimed the blow turned to flee. But a gripe of iron was upon the assassin; and the knife torn from his grasp.

"Dog-of-a-murderer!" cried Franz Edouin, finally overpowering the ruffian, and holding him pinioned to the pave, with the dagger fairly pricking his throat. "Villain in the dark! why do you seek my life?"

"Because you are Franz Edouin," gurgled the choking man.

"And Franz Edouin may be your death—"

"Mercy!"

"I never forget a face—scoundrel! and I do not recollect ever having seen yours. I have in no way crossed you. Tell me, then, who bribed you to strike that blow? Speak, or this knife shall open your guilty veins!"

"You will spare my life?"

"Yes. Answer."

"Colonel Philip De Vin."

"Ah! Why does Colonel Philip De Vin desire to have me out of his way?"

"I do not know it—I vow solemnly. You said you would spare my life."

"Go, then," said Franz, releasing him and giving him a kick as he ran off. "Miserable dog in the service of a coward master! your life or death is nothing to me. But I may not spare you if you repeat that trick again." And to himself: "So, I have an enemy in Philip De Vin. A cunning upstart acquiring momentary rank from the Central Committee. Good. I shall be on my guard against him, and ascertain the cause of his enmity. My foes are multiplying fast—ha! Great Heaven! what is this?" suddenly pausing and holding up his hands in consternation. "The ring of diamonds! It is gone—gone! Oh, Osalind! how can I ever face you without it? That assassin—wheeling as if for pursuit of his recent antagonist; but not a soul was in sight, and the surrounding was still as a tomb."

The ruffian emissary of Philip De Vin and Helen Varcla realizing the failure of his attempt on behalf of his first-named employer, did not neglect other opportunities. During the fierce wrestle with Franz Edouin, he had adroitly slipped the ring of diamonds from the latter's finger, and as he ran and disappeared in the darkness, he was exclaiming:

"*Dieu!* how lucky. I have escaped with my life, I have the ring, for which I am to receive a louis, and I can notify Helen Varcla—for I heard him say that he would leave Versailles to-morrow night. Lucky Hassim!—lucky dog!"

This, then, was the writer of the letter to Helen Varcla, dated at Versailles and subscribed "Signo," according to an understanding with the actress; and from this party De Vin received the ring of diamonds, which he handed to Osalind Ray, the next night, and which caused her to faint as she recalled the words of her lover:

"When you shall see this ring out of my possession, you may know that Franz Edouin is no more to you. Because I shall be dead!"

Franz Edouin, disconsolate over the loss of the ring, and dreading to meet his betrothed without having it to return to her, felt himself in a sore dilemma. From this he finally roused, by deciding:

"I will never speak with her again, until I can hand back the ring I so solemnly promised to keep safe. Now let all the plot and ingenuity, with which I have been credited in the past, come to my aid. First, if that foul assassin was bribed by Philip De Vin, then he has, no doubt, followed me from Paris. Ah! I begin to see: the pursuit on the road—the pistol-shot was meant for me. Paris, then, is the lurking-place of this assassin, and I will find him somewhere near the person of Philip De Vin. I will hasten my return to Paris."

Instead of waiting for the night, Franz Edouin left Versailles next morning, disguised as a peddler; and this early departure defeated certain plans agreed upon for his capture, between Helen Varcla and the Voodoo of *El Bibou*.

CHAPTER IX.

FRANZ EDOUIN'S DISCOVERIES.

ALTHOUGH resolved never to speak with his betrothed until he could restore to her the diamond ring—considering not only its value embodied in the precious stones, but, also, its endeared associations—Franz Edouin could not resist the desire to be near and gaze, himself unseen, upon the face of beautiful Osalind.

When he had spent the day, in clever disguise, searching vainly for Philip De Vin, and when the darkness of night fell upon the city, he left his quarters and walked rapidly toward the house of M. Achefort, on Rue de Lafayette, avoiding the localities in which he had recently very near lost his life, and also making numerous *detours* because of barricades which had been erected since his departure for Versailles.

The assassin had reached Paris many hours before him, delivered the ring to Philip De Vin—who swore a round oath of satisfaction when he had it in his possession—and at the moment when Franz Edouin started for Rue de Lafayette, Helen Varcla was pacing to and fro across her room, as seen in our second chapter, with a certain letter in her hand, which she had received during the day, apprising her of the intended return of Franz Edouin on that night; also, the emissaries of the Voodoo were retracing their way from a bootless scout upon the Versailles road—it being then after the time they had been given to understand that Edouin could be met and captured there; and, also, Pierre Plaque, the Death-cart driver, was closeted with a ruffian relative, in a south-eastern section of the city, relating the adventures and mishaps of the previous night, together with certain discoveries or suspicions concerning the detective, which deeply interested both narrator and listener, for a reason to be explained hereafter.

Entering the house of M. Achefort, Franz Edouin ascended noiselessly to the flat above.

Directly opposite the door of the artist's studio branched a sort of side or communicating passage extending about fifteen feet to another and still smaller one running parallel with the main entryway, and when the door of the studio was open a person at the far end of this cross-passage could plainly view whatever transpired inside the apartment. The door was now only slightly ajar, and though the lover could see neither the artist nor his daughter, he could distinctly hear their conversation. Impelled purely by his great love for Osalind, and hoping that, by some chance, the door might be opened so that he could gaze upon her, he involuntarily became an eavesdropper, his attention being doubly riveted by an utterance from Dorian Ray, just as he arrived within hearing.

"Noble Franz!" were the words. "I love him, Osalind. Would that he could be here now."

"Ah!" thought the delighted lover, regardless of the part he was playing, "they talk of me, and kindly. It is said that people who listen seldom hear good of themselves; yet how can I resist, when the woman I adore, and who has given me her heart's love, sits and converses beyond that door? Now Osalind is speaking."

The voice of Osalind:

"Victor Bramont is our only shadow—this man of mystery and power. You say that he wishes me to wed him—he, a villain, libertine and outcast. You say, in case I refuse him, his heel may crush you and his machinations destroy me. . . . Oh! father, to give up Franz Edouin!"—and at this juncture she was startled, as will be remembered, by a noise in the passage without.

The noise was occasioned by a stamp with the foot and a blow on the wall with a clenched fist, as Franz Edouin exclaimed to himself:

"Now, by Heaven! this passes patience! Am I destined ever to meet this hated Victor Bramont?—that I may strangle out his craven breath! Wed him, forsooth! I shall shoot him at sight. Oh, Osalind! my beloved, I dare not meet your reproachful eyes; but I am near, and with this good right arm will aid you at the proper moment. Thrice accursed be the im-

pulse that led me to ask the loan of the diamond ring! Hark! there is a messenger at the door. I hear the rattle of a saber. What brings soldiery here?"

A moment later he heard a voice command:

"Post a sentinel at the stair below; also one at the far end of this side passage. These Americans are reckless fellows, and Monsieur Ray may have a notion to try to escape."

"That is the voice of Philip De Vin!" burst from Franz, in an under-breath. "He is surrounded by vassals who would riddle me with bullets at a signal from their villainous master. To confront him now would be extreme madness. I must play at hide-and-seek, for the present; though I would much like to know what brings him to the rooms of Dorian Ray. I cannot escape below, and this fellow is almost on my concealment. Ah! the roof."

One of the soldiers was rapidly approaching, and in another instant would have discovered the lover in hiding.

Franz Edouin judged rightly that Philip De Vin, in his unquenchable hate for the man who had escaped the knife of his hired assassin—with redoubled rage at his proximity when about taking steps toward possessing himself of the beautiful maiden—would immediately have ordered the guards to shoot down his rival. But ere the advancing sentry reached his post at the further and dark end of the narrow side passage, Franz had climbed out upon the roof, and it was his crawling figure which startled Annette, as she gazed from the trap of M. Epont's house in search of a signal-light expected by her mistress.

After firing a shot at the soldiers departing—and hoping that the bullet had found the head of Philip De Vin—he returned to the flat of the artist and strode forward to the studio.

"Whether I have the ring or not," he determined, "I will ascertain what business brought the villainous De Vin to this house."

He walked into the studio—and paused at the sight presented.

Osalind, still in that deep swoon caused by the belief that her lover had perished, lay upon the sofa like one dead. Beside her, and using every convenient means to bring the stricken maiden back to consciousness, was the French girl employed by Philip De Vin to play jailer to his prize until he had effectually disposed of Dorian Ray.

"Girl, what means this?" he demanded, sternly.

"*Merci!*" cried the girl, wheeling in half fright, for she had not heard him enter.

"*Merci!* Where do you come from?"

"Answer me."

"Indeed! Who are you?"

"It were wiser for you to answer my questions than to anger me. What brought Philip De Vin here? Where is Dorian Ray? Ah! my poor Osalind—" and here, with an overpowering emotion, he hastened to the side of his betrothed, kneeling and grasping her cold hands.

Then a cry burst from his lips. One of the hands relaxed its rigid clench, and the ring of diamonds dropped to the matting. Scarcely believing his eyes, he snatched it up.

"Monsieur! Robber! you have stolen my lady's ring!"

"Silence, girl!" And to himself: "Treachery! By having received this ring, she imagines that I am dead. When she awakes she will know better," and, unperceived by the French girl, he drew off a peculiar ring which he wore, quickly slipping it on one of Osalind's fingers.

"This," he added, "will lead her to believe that I am still alive, and have been here." Then aloud, and laying hold upon the girl with such a terrible gripe that she screamed outright: "Speak! Where is Dorian Ray?"

"Monsieur! Oh! my arm!"

"Where is he, I ask?" shaking the imprisoned arm roughly.

"A prisoner—"

"And you?"

"I am to guard my lady until the return of Monsieur De Vin—"

"Enough. I see it all—I see it all now. But, not yet, scoundrel De Vin. Ah! not yet."

"Monsieur will not take my lady's ring?"

Franz Edouin was moving hurriedly from the room, heedless of the girl's protest, and muttering as he went:

"No, Philip De Vin, not yet. Every moment will I shadow you. I know, now, where to find you. When next you come here you will meet Franz Edouin, instead of the trapped prey you anticipate. Two deep and deadly enemies have I now; Victor Bramont and Philip De Vin. Earth cannot hold these two men and me. I will secure a trusty messenger, communicate with Osalind and remove her from this net of treachery, while I also see to the safety of Dorian Ray, her insulted father."

CHAPTER X.

A BRACE OF RASCALS.

UNFORTUNATELY for Franz Edouin, the events immediately succeeding upon his departure from the house of M. Achefort totally disarranged his plans for the safety of Dorian Ray and the rescue of Osalind from the clutches of De Vin.

Hardly had he set foot upon the pave outside,

when he was attacked by three powerful and desperate men—the very three, it chanced, who had lain in wait for and missed him on the Versailles road, and who now recognized him at their coveted prey. Though quick and accurate with the pistol, he had no time to loosen these weapons from his belt, but gave his adversaries smart battle with a short sword, which, since his return to Paris, he wore beneath his cloak. Being but a poor swordsman—and his assailants rendered furious by his having previously eluded them—he was soon defeated, and must have perished, as shown toward the conclusion of Chapter II, but for the timely intervention of Helen Varcla, whose remarkable prowess in the use of the sword alone saved his life.

Having no idea to whom he owed his deliverance, and spellbound as he lay where he had fallen, watching the wonderful skill of the actress, his surprise increased when the maid, Annette, cried out—as her mistress put to flight the last of the assassins—pointing, at the same time, to the prostrate young man:

"Madame! this man is Franz Edouin!"

But before relating what transpired when Helen Varcla found herself face to face with one of the men she so earnestly desired to capture, let us see what the important conversation was that progressed between Pierre Plaque and his rascal-of-a-relative in the home of the first named.

The Death-cart driver sat and swayed upon a stool having but one leg fixed in its center. Beside him was a table containing a bottle, two glasses and a jug. Behind him was a cracked and blistered mantle-piece which supported a cheap, sputtering candle. Opposite him, on a stool also having but one leg, was a man of rags and dirty countenance, with bloodshot eyes, shaggy head and short, bristling beard. The room in which the two had sociably chatted for some time, smoking and tippling, was a small, square, squalid place, more of a den, with low ceiling, stained walls and atmosphere thick with fumes of tobacco and liquor.

"You see, brother Jacoli," said Pierre Plaque speaking in English, with his small one eye closed and head askew, as he lighted a short clay pipe with a sulphurous match, "you see, the accident of which I spoke might have happened, had not my mind been so very much occupied with the intention to wound—not kill—this so-called Franz Edouin. Thinking of this, and other things of him, I did not see the heap in the road time enough to turn my horse aside; so over we went, and the consequence was—well, two dead men and a smash-up. Thanks to Cluseret, whom I pronounce a fine fellow, too good for his associates, I shall have a new cart by tomorrow."

"Well," growled the other, "supposing you had wounded, not killed Franz Edouin?"

"Then I should have made a very valuable capture," puffing vigorously at the pipe, and ogling like an oracle.

"What to do with him?"

"By the bones of the catacombs!" squeaked Pierre Plaque, removing the pipe from his mouth, stretching his lips nearly from ear to ear—like a dog about to present its fangs—and leaning suddenly forward, while his large one eye rolled round and round. "Better ask, brother Jacoli, what I would have done with her."

"Her!" ejaculated his companion, surprised.

"Did I not say 'her'?"

The two remained for a moment, nose to nose. Then Jacoli snapped his fingers, saying:

"Pooh! Now I catch your meaning. You have told me that this Franz Edouin is the living image of Gertrude Ray, the wife of the American. You think that he is *she*. Pooh! Gertrude Ray, resurrected, in disguise, and so on. Pooh!" and again his big fingers snapped.

"But that is just what I do think, snap and 'pooh' to your heart's content. We know that Gertrude Ray was a strong woman, fond of boating, fencing, shooting, and many other exercises which men pursue. Eighteen years might not change her face so much, and her acquirements in many arts would admirably fit her for the disguise. Ho! yes. I am quite sure that this same detective is she, and no other, and that she did not die, as you and I supposed, on the night that we robbed the house of Dorian Ray, in England. Yes, I am quite sure. Dorian Ray, the artist, is now in Paris. How much money, do you think, he would give, in his overjoy, to the man who could say: 'Dorian Ray, be no longer deceived; the wife of your heart still lives; I can produce her.' Eh?—how much, Jacoli?"

"Pooh, I say! A most unlikely case. And do you think that Gertrude Ray, having escaped death—if she did escape at all (?)—would remain for eighteen years disguised from the man she loved with all her woman's soul? Pooh!"

"By the bones of the catacombs! but you are a dolt!" squealed and hissed Pierre Plaque, working his elbows up and down excitedly. "Put this and that together. We know that Gertrude Ray was poisoned by a man whom we have never seen since we spied, from the balcony of flowers, upon his deed of poisoning. The wife of Ray being, by some means, pre-

served from the grave—and having, by some other means, discovered that there was a plot to poison her—the fact of her assuming the role of a detective proves to me that she expects, sooner or later, to meet with the man or woman—she not knowing which—who sought her life. Having settled this, and bringing the guilty one to justice, she will unmask and fall into the arms of her husband. Ho! I am sure that Franz Edouin and Gertrude are one and the same person. Oh! by the bones! yes—

"You are filled with nightmare philosophies to-night," interrupted Jacoli, with a snarl. "But hark! there is a clatter on the street."

The sound of galloping horsehoofs fell upon their ears. Then there were audible murmurings, mingled with two or three gunshots in the distance, as if some one on horseback was being pursued and fired at.

"What madcap race is this?" exclaimed Pierre Plaque, rising and wriggling to the door, closely followed by Jacoli.

Reaching the threshold, they were in time to see a swiftly-speeding horse approaching, his hoofs ringing and thumping loudly, and on his back, with arms twined in a frantic hold around his neck, was a female figure. Directly before their eyes the animal plunged and fell with a mad snort of pain, and the rider was thrown several feet ahead, where she lay still as a corpse.

"Ha!" sputtered Pierre, springing out to the horse, which was evidently dead, "this beast is full of bullets and bleeding at every joint. But this girl—is she dead? and who can she be, I wonder? Let me have a look at her before this crowd arrives."

A large crowd was gathering to the spot, and Pierre Plaque hastily squatted by the insensible figure, raising the head of opulent and disordered hair and peering into the white, cold face. Then the Death-cart driver acted suddenly in a very strange manner. Grasping the limp form in his skinny but strong arms, he ran back to his abode, calling to Jacoli to follow and bolt the door without delay.

"Haste!" he cried, in a cracked, excited voice. "Quick! Let us escape from the coming crowd."

"And what, in Satan's name, are you going to do with that maiden?" demanded Jacoli, while he obeyed the order to fasten the door securely.

"Oh! by the bones of the catacombs! if she be not dead!" jabbered Pierre Plaque, placing his burden on a wooden lounge, with his vest and an old bag for a pillow, and snatching up the jug from the table to wipe and bathe the face of the beautiful maiden. Then, as she showed signs of life:

"Oh! she lives! This is rich. Luck upon luck. By the bones! another prize! Ha! ha!" and he capered about like a monkey, swinging his cone-shaped woolen cap in the air.

"Another prize. Pooh!" surlily grumbled Jacoli. "We shall have the crowd hammering down our door presently. In harboring her we may be interfering with some vengeance of the rabble. But who is it?"

"Plague upon the rabble! Look!" He sprang to the mantle-piece, took up the candle and then waved the flickering flame before the face of the maiden. "Look at that," he yelled. "You will recognize? We have seen that face when its owner was little more than an infant—in England—about seventeen years ago."

"Tooth and toe-nail! yes," snarled Jacoli, leaning eagerly over the wooden back of the lounge. "I have seen that face when it was worn by an infant."

"See!" continued Pierre, in a hysteric gibber, "the very birth-mark—an ace of diamonds—on the left side of the neck."

"Yes!"

"It is the child of Selissa Gordon. Twenty years ago, Helen Varcla, now the famous actress, bore the name of Selissa Gordon, gaining it by marriage with a wealthy jeweler of that name. When the child of Gertrude Ray was two years old, the child of Selissa Gordon—my wife, Catherine Plaque, was its nurse—was stolen by a man named Victor Bramont, who stabbed my wife to death, in the cellar of Proctor Gordon's house. This I learned in a letter which my wife wrote to me ere she expired, for I was then in Paris, and have never been to England since, as you know. In this maiden, we have found the lost child of Selissa Gordon, now Helen Varcla, the actress. Gold shall be ours! Untold money! Oh! what a prize!" and again Pierre Plaque commenced a wild dance of gayety.

But the light that showed these two rascals the supposed child of Selissa Gordon, will also discover to the reader that their prize was Osalind Ray, wounded, nigh to death by a terrible and perilous ride on the horse that now lay full of bullets on the pave outside.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACTRESS AND THE VOODOO.

IN the same moment that the maid, Annette, cried out the identity of the man lying on the pave—and as he was rising to his feet, and as Helen Varcla, sword in hand, wheeled around with an exclamation of surprise and gratifica-

tion—the heavy, iron-picketed gate of *El Bibou* swung open and two men emerged. The two were the men who had brought Victor Bramont to the house of the Voodoo, and, evidently, they had overheard the words of Annette, for one asked:

"Where is he? I have reason to believe that Xlmo, my mistress, has a special desire to see Franz Edouin."

"This way!" called Helen Varcla, not hearing the man's question, but perceiving that the two came from the owl-a-house, and judging instantly that they were in the employ of the Voodoo. "This way, quickly! Aid me to capture this man whom your mistress has bargained with me to have secure in her house this night."

"By Heaven! it is from the frying-pan into the coals!" thought Franz Edouin; and aloud, he cried: "Whoever you are, beware! I have no intention to become the prisoner of any one. Back—all of you! or this pistol shall—"

A terrific and skillful cut from the sword of Helen Varcla knocked the drawn and leveled pistol from his grasp, and simultaneously the two men threw themselves upon him with the ferocity of tigers.

Aided by the actress, who succeeded in tripping the victim, Franz was soon overpowered and bound hand and foot, when Helen Varcla hissed menacingly into his ears:

"A loud word, or a cry for help, and I shall brain you with this sword!"

Realizing the utter uselessness of any attempt to invoke assistance, and his inability to resist further, Franz remained passive and silent in the hands of his captors, groaning in spirit at the recollection of his beloved Osalind being now, more than ever, unprotected and in the power of the villainous Philip De Vin.

"Oh, Heaven of the helpless!" he thought, "what have I done to deserve this? My poor, poor Osalind! God alone can aid you now!"

As they passed the great gate, Annette bent over him and whispered, unnoticed by the others: "Fear not. I am sure that my mistress means you no harm."

As she spoke thus encouragingly, the group was brought abruptly to a stand by a loud, sullen, threatening growl in front.

"The dog! The dog of our mistress!" hissed, in affright, the two men who carried Edouin between them, and their knees smote together as the huge dog, Belial, came bounding and leaping down the broad path to attack the intruders.

Annette sunk to the ground on her knees, covering her face in terror. Franz Edouin gave one glance at the monstrous, savage, blood-thirsty animal, and averted his face with a feeling of sickness. Helen Varcla alone seemed unmoved by this prospect of a terrible encounter. She stood in advance, her form slightly bent, with one foot thrown out, and the hand that carried the sword drawn back past the hip. Her teeth were set and every muscle gathered for one fierce blow at the coming foe.

On he rushed, his massive jaws snapping, his fangs grating; at every leap he uttered a mad yelp and increased his headlong speed as he neared the group.

"Surely, I have heard that yelp before!" exclaimed Helen Varcla, a sudden light gleaming in her eyes; and she called sternly aloud the one word:

"Belial!"

The brute slackened his gait at once, and if he could have spoken he would have said, much like Helen Varcla:

"Surely, I have heard my name called by that very voice before!"

"Belial, good pet, come here!" commanded the actress, following up the effect produced by her first word.

Belial halted a few leaps from her. Then he gave vent to a prolonged whine and trotted forward, rearing upon his hinder legs until he towered above her head, and placed both big paws upon her shoulders. The next minute she was patting him affectionately on the head and ears and smoothing his still bristling back.

"*Mon Dieu!*" blurted the astonished *agueras*, "instead of the dog devouring her at one snap, they are hugging each other! Look!"

Annette was both terrified and amazed at the novel position of her mistress. Helen Varcla was speaking to the dog in English, and could the others have been near enough to catch, and all understand her language, they would have heard something like this:

"Good Belial! Oh, my favorite! How strange to meet you here! Ten years have passed since you were stolen from me, and though you were then but a year old, you do not forget the first mistress who fed you. There—there—good fellow! no kisses from your ugly but precious nose. Let me pat and play a moment with this bairy head. So you wish to hug me? Ha! ha! ha! You gave us quite a scare, a moment since. Have you forgotten this sound?"—puckering her lips and trilling a shrill whistle, to which Belial answered with two distinct, loud, hoarse barks. "No, I see you remember the signal of your first mistress."

During her address, she was receiving kindly the demonstrations of the terrible though sagacious brute, until he had recognized, beyond doubt, a former and much-loved mistress in the

woman who, a moment previous, he would readily have torn to pieces. Gently removing the herculean limbs from her shoulders, she turned to her companions with:

"Come, friends: this good dog is an old comrade of mine. Whoever walks with me need have no fear of his teeth."

She started toward the house, Belial trotting docilely at her side, and the rest of the party following rather timidly.

"Ay, but this woman is a witch!" declared one of the men who carried Franz Edouin. "For none but a witch could so easily charm such a devil-of-a-dog!"

Annette, with a sudden comprehension dawning, was saying to herself:

"There is but one explanation of this. The mastiff must be the same that was lost or stolen from my mistress when she played in London ten years ago. It was the last gift of her husband, a few days before he died. I have heard her call him with that same peculiar whistle she gave just now, and the dog would come though a hundred men barred his way."

Arrived at the door Annette gave the bell a pull. The answer being tardy, Helen Varcla herself wrenched at the knob, occasioning those impatient sounds heard by Zabach and the Voodoo just after the latter had consigned Victor Bramont to the secret pit beneath the room where she carried on her orgies of mystery.

Let us make a note, here, that the actress and the Voodoo had never met in any arrangement transpiring between them since the sojourn of the former in Paris—whatever business there was being transacted by deputy, and that deputy was the faithful Zabach. Now, when they gazed full at each other, and in the silence which followed the speech of Helen Varcla at the close of Chapter III, the latter seemed struck by some strange and thrilling likeness which she beheld in the brown features of the reputed sorceress.

The staring eyes of the Voodoo glistened like stars, and her whole frame quivered with a momentary excitement. Recovering her calm, weirdly bearing, she stalked forward, dropped her death's-head cane and grasped both of Helen Varcla's hands.

"Now I know," she said, so low that none but the actress could hear her, "how you could safely pass Belial. I was told that Helen Varcla had lost a child, which no one but Victor Bramont could find for her; also that you suspicious Franz Edouin to be that child. Had I seen your face before, I could have undeceived you, notwithstanding you received a taunting letter from Victor Bramont, telling you that he intended to rear the child in man's garb and to the vocation of a man. His was an absurd and impracticable threat, though you, picking eagerly at every hope—the hope strengthened when you beheld Franz Edouin's womanish face—believed him. I can tell you that Franz Edouin is a true and famous man, and not your child, because your child was a girl. Had I known, also, ten years ago, that you had changed your name to Helen Varcla, I could have returned to you the dog, Belial; for I knew that he belonged to Selissa Gordon, and Selissa Gordon had disappeared."

"Do not trifle with me, woman," broke in Helen Varcla. "Since you know me so well, and so much of my business, tell me who you are? And if I have a wrong clew, or no clew at all, to my lost child, can you tell me where to look for that child?"

"Xlmo is notorious for her wisdom," replied the Voodoo, who never once removed her piercing glance from the other's face, "but she cannot tell you where to find your long-lost daughter. As to who I am, you will learn anon. Suffice it, that I once loved you—a singular confession for one like me—when your name was Selissa Gordon. Zabach"—signifying for the two ruffians to begone—"conduct those men beyond the gate; return, and we will visit Victor Bramont."

"Victor Bramont! Then you have the wretch safe?" cried Helen Varcla, glowing with exultation.

"He is my prisoner. He shall tell us what became of the child when he snatched it from the nurse, and nigh stabbed that nurse to death."

"Then she did not die?"

"No, though you were at the bedside when recovery seemed impossible. She lived, Helen Varcla—lived for vengeance on Victor Bramont!"

"Now, by all the good memory of my life! I know you. You are—"

"Hush!" A quick, commanding gesture checked the words upon Helen Varcla's lips.

"Franz Edouin," said the Voodoo, proceeding to liberate the young man, "you are free. Be wise, and do not attempt to pass Belial until either Helen Varcla, Zabach or I can accompany you."

CHAPTER XII.

BRAMONT AND HIS ENEMIES.

"DEPEND upon it," said Franz Edouin, in reply to the Voodoo, "I have no wish to be devoured by that great dog of yours, and will wait until you can give me safe conduct beyond

the gate. I beg of you not to detain me long, for two most precious people, whom I fondly love, are in lion peril, and at this moment sadly in need of my assistance. I would even ask that you allow me to depart immediately—but for one reason—

"What is that reason?" carelessly inquired the Voodoo, as she removed the last knot of his bonds and he rose to his feet.

"I have heard you say that you have in your power a man whose name is Victor Bramont. Is he now in this house?"

"Well, what of that?"

"I must see him."

"You!" exclaimed the Voodoo.

"What is Victor Bramont to you?" questioned Helen Varela.

"Victor Bramont"—clenching his fists with a feeling of fury at thought of the hated owner of the name—"is my deadly enemy. I have sworn that he or I must die!"

"What cause have you for this vow?" and Helen Varela stepped toward the young man, gazing intently into his womanish but brave face.

"He is the persecutor of the woman I love, and who is soon to wed me. He is the thorn in my path to prick and sting in the very prospect of my happiness. Is not that enough to make it his life or mine?"

"Come with us," said Xlmo, as Zabach re-entered. "You shall see him and may easily recognize him."

"Not so; for I have never yet seen the scoundrel."

"Now," thought Helen Varela, "there is a mystery about this young man. The more I look upon him, now that he is close to me, the more his face reminds me of Dorlan Ray when Ray was younger. Pahi!"—and again she exclaimed, inwardly, as a short time before, when waiting for the signal from *El Bibou*: "A curse upon Dorlan Ray and all that is his! If I thought that this Franz Edouin could be the child of Dorlan Ray, I would still be his enemy, and in some way ruin him for vengeance upon his father who rejected my passionate love and accepted Gertrude's. But it is folly to think of this. The boy child of Ray—when Ray, driven insane by the death of his wife, had to be confined in a private asylum—was placed in an orphan home, and as I have not heard of it since, it is very likely died there."

"It is very plain to me," ran in the mind of the Voodoo, motioning Zabach to lead the way from the room, and at the same time recovering her death's-head cane, "why Franz Edouin so furiously hates Victor Bramont. Dorlan Ray has a daughter—whom I have never seen, so closely does he keep her confined in the house over the way—and Victor Bramont has come to Paris with the purpose of wedding her. Strange as it may seem, considering the artist's wild adoration for his first wife, Dorlan Ray must have married again; else, how came he to have a daughter? So, then, Franz Edouin must be the accepted lover of the maiden partially promised or fully pledged to Victor Bramont. For the present, I must keep these two men apart, or he may kill Victor Bramont before Helen Varela obtains the information she seeks."

And Franz was thinking, while he followed the actress and the Voodoo:

"If these two women hate Victor Bramont as intensely as I do, then he will never leave this house alive. By Heaven! I will shoot him, sooner than he shall escape to further terrify my beloved Osalind." But feeling for his pistol, he was reminded that his captors had taken his weapons from him. "No matter," he muttered, "for the ardor of my hate will give these hands strength enough to strangle him twice over."

"Franz Edouin," said the Voodoo, as if her professed witchcraft had enabled her to read his very thoughts, "no matter how fierce the enmity you bear Victor Bramont, let me warn you that he is Helen Varela's prisoner, so you must not seek to harm him."

"So be it! I trust she will order his death."

"Man in the hole! Man in the hole!" shrieked the parrot, as the trio passed beyond the door and into the gloomy entryway.

Hardly more than fifteen minutes had elapsed after Victor Bramont was hurled, by means of the dumb-waiter closet to the lowermost foundation of the house, when the Voodoo, the actress and the detective started down a narrow back stairway, Zabach leading and carrying the lamp which he took from the cat's head over the entrance to the ante-room; and we will return to the prisoner when, almost blind from the effect of the subtle powder which the Voodoo blew into his eyes—while the pain of his wounded finger and the smart of the bruises given by the death's-head cane roused a demon of rage within him—he shot downward with dangerous velocity, struck the bottom of hard earth, and was pitched, by the shock, headlong forward into impenetrable darkness.

"Diable!" he roared, scrambling to his feet. "I am a dead man beyond doubt! Cursed sorcerer! my eyes are nearly out. Little use they would be, though, in this ditch-of-a-hole. Where am I? How to get out before that witch comes to finish the work! In spite of her negro locks,

her brown skin—artificial both—and her role of a Voodoo, all, I know her. *Sa re!* yes. She is Catherine Plaque, whom I stabbed, in England, when I took from her the child of Selissa Gordon. But this finger of mine—I shall bleed to death, I fear. Devil seize that popgun cane!"

As well as he could, not being able to see what he was about, he bound up the wounded finger with his handkerchief.

"This Helen Varela, too," he mumbled, "I am sure is no other than Selissa Gordon. Ho! she may mean to slay me alive! Both captors are thirsty for my life! But stay; this so-called Helen Varela dare not destroy me, for then she would never learn the whereabouts of her lost child. I, alone, possess the secret. Ha! ha! there I have her by the hip. Hark! What was that?"

He started as a peculiar noise, like a low, vindictive hiss fell distinctly upon his ears. This was followed by a squirming, scraping sound, and then his hair fairly rose on end, for the terrible warning of the rattlesnake rung sharply through the darkness. Audacious and villainously brave man though he was, the soul of Victor Bramont shrunk within him when he heard that signal of horror. Stimulated by very fright, he sprung hither and thither, kicking and pounding the walls, only to discover that he was surrounded by a solid masonry that would defy the muscles of a Hercules.

"Snakes!" he howled, while he battered and plunged vainly about. "I am in a den of snakes! The sorceress means that I shall die of poisonous bites and rot in this abominable hole! Ho! to die of a snake bite! Think of that! What a fate for Victor Bramont! Help, there! Hallo! Let me out! Strangle me! Put a Lul-lit in my skin! Anything but this! *Sacre diable!* Hear the snakes!—a hundred or more!"

Frightened to frenzy, he sprung and dashed madly this way and that, while the noise around him, above him, on every side, increased until it seemed as if scores of venomous snakes, aroused and angered by his loud raving, hissed, rattled and squirmed in anticipation of battle with the desperate man.

"*Diable!* Help! Murderer Voodoo!—help, or I perish! If I die, a secret dies with me. Help!"

A glare of light suddenly flashed upon him, illuminating and showing the miserable nature of his surrounding. Near the ceiling, and on all four sides, extended a continuous cage of finely-woven wire. In this cage were confined the serpents whose hissing, gliding and rattling struck terror to the heart of the captive. The floor of the cell was of cemented flags. On three sides were massive and impenetrable walls; on the fourth side, a small, grated window. At this window stood Xlmo, the Voodoo, who had flashed forward the lamp. In a single second, when discovering that he was safe from the fangs of the serpents, Victor Bramont recovered his usual spirit of dare-devil boldness.

"Ho! you witch! You thought to scare my life out. What next, Catherine Plaque?—which ever you are. *Sacre!* Release me!"

"It is not likely, Victor Bramont—who once assumed the name of Saul Secor—that I shall give you another chance to stab me. The thanks I received, when I agreed to assist you in the abduction of Selissa Gordon's child, was a knife-thrust aimed at my heart. As you fled from the deed of blood, I promised that I would not die, but would live to kill you, Victor Bramont."

"*Diable!* Then you mean to kill me, after saying that I was not your prisoner?"

"Catherine Plaque!" exclaimed Helen Varela, stepping to the window and grasping the Voodoo roughly by the arm. "Woman! do I hear that you aided Victor Bramont to rob me of my child? What had I done to you, to be the victim of such base treachery?"

"*Diable!*" muttered Bramont. "I am right. Helen Varela is Selissa Gordon."

"Speak not of the past, but of the present," said the Voodoo, quickly, and freeing her arm from the grips of the actress.

"Scoundrel Bramont!" cried Franz Edouin, showing himself, "these women have business with you. Have it over briefly. Then you will settle an account with me."

"*Diable!*" exclaimed Bramont, in his heart, while he eyed the young man in a puzzled way; "this is Franz Edouin, the French detective, whom I once met abroad, and who looked to me the image of Dorlan Ray at the time when Ray, crazy over the death of his wife, was confined in the private asylum." And aloud, he snapped: "With you? An account with you? *Sacre!* Another foe. And what have I done to you?"

"You are the wretch who persecutes the woman pledged to be my bride. I have sworn that you or I must die!"

"Oho, my merry fellow! If I am to have a fair show, I shall soon be rid of you—be sure of that. If you are thinking of the beautiful Osalind Ray, make up your mind that she is mine, pledged to me seventeen years ago—"

"Rascal! Let me enter his cell!"

But the Voodoo held him back, while she thought:

"A mystery here: for I know that Dorlan Ray did not have a daughter so long ago as seventeen years."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

It did not occur to Helen Varela that the declaration of Victor Bramont contained any thing remarkable. Her mind being preoccupied with a hungry longing to discover, from him, the whereabouts of her own child, it did not strike and impress her, as it did the Voodoo, that Dorlan Ray could not possibly have had a daughter as long ago as seventeen years prior to this night, although she, as well as Xlmo, might have recollected the date, and that Dorlan Ray, helplessly insane, was confined in a private asylum at that time. She only meditated:

"I have now before me the man who tried to strangle me because I witnessed his tampering with the medicine of Gertrude Ray; who robbed me of my child; who stabbed the nurse in treacherous payment of his own treachery in aiding him to abduct that child. Now and here he shall tell me where to find my long-lost daughter, or every snake in yonder slimy cage shall be let loose upon him."

Franz Edouin had gripped one of the bars at the narrow window as if he would wrench it out and get at the imprisoned villain whose speech made the blood boil with indignation. Xlmo held him firmly—though all his strength could not have unjointed the stoutly-riven bars—and would have expostulated with him, when the actress sternly addressed Victor Bramont:

"Tell me, wretch: where is my child?"

"Do you think I have carried the brat about from place to place, for seventeen years?" he snapped.

"Nothing of the sort," continued the actress. "But that you know where she is, I am convinced. And never will you come out of there alive, until my questions are answered and answered truly."

"Very right," passed in that brain of Victor Bramont; "I do know where she is, and no one else can tell." But he spoke no word aloud.

"Victor Bramont!" cried the actress, grasping the iron bars and glaring angrily through the window, "twenty-one years ago Dorlan Ray, and Gertrude, his wife, had a boy child—"

"*Diable!* I know that. I know, also, that you madly loved Dorlan Ray yourself, and afterward hated him because he married this Gertrude."

"No matter!" she interrupted, suppressing the fiery passion which arose within her at remembrance of the time when, twenty-two years before, Dorlan Ray had rejected her in maidenly avowal of love. "No matter. You, who wretched, were as deeply enamored of Gertrude as I was wild to possess Dorlan Ray."

"*Diable!* that is true."

"You vowed that she should never live as another man's wife! You concealed the deadly hate you bore both man and wife, and wounded yourself into an intimacy with Dorlan Ray—"

"*Diable!* yes; and so did you in the same manner, for you won the confidence of his wife, while you hated her immensely. We were a pair, eh?" sneered Bramont, folding his arms and scowling upon the actress.

"Most gracious Heaven!" murmured Franz Edouin to himself. "I feel that I am now to learn the grand, and mayhap, terrible secret which has blighted the lives of Dorlan Ray and my beloved Osalind."

"But I was not the guilty serpent you were," resumed Helen Varela, her brilliant eyes glancing fury and scorn upon her enemy. "When Dorlan Ray was lost to me—although I intensely hated him and all that was his firm at that moment—I would at least have let him live in peace, and rather felt a pride that I did not betray the gall in my wounded heart. You, despicable schemer, made Gertrude believe that you had buried your passion for her, and by toadying to Dorlan Ray you succeeded in becoming an inmate of his household. In an evil hour you tempted Dorlan Ray, and finally led him to the commission of a breach of trust which necessitated his flight from the country. When you had removed him from your path, by means of most diabolical treachery, you made proposals to his wife, which she, as a true woman, scorned and severely resented. When delivered of her child, and while sick almost unto death, I saw you deliberately poison her; for I was then, by chance, in the house, and caught you in the very act."

"She is trying to draw me into a confession before these witnesses," he muttered, in his mind, glancing covertly at the Voodoo and the detective. "*Diable!* go on, Helen Varela!" the last aloud.

"I pursued you through the garden, to catch you and have you hung for the perpetration of such a dastardly deed; for you fled when you saw that I had detected you. You tried to strangle me in the garden. Had these arms of mine possessed the muscle then that they do now"—baring her large, tough and sinewy arm and shaking a tight-clenched fist at him—"it would have been you—not me—left insensible on the grass! Dorlan Ray, returning too late

even for his wife's funeral, became a veritable madman with grief, and had to be placed in an insane asylum. His son, who bore the birthmark of a red crescent in the palm of his right hand—was placed, by proper persons, in the Orphan Asylum at Chichester—

The actress was interrupted, and all were startled, by a quick cry more like the shriek of some infuriated animal. Franz Edouin, with wide staring eyes, panting breath, and whole frame quivering with a terrible excitement, tugged and wrung savagely at the bars, straining every nerve until red in the face, while he gasped and shouted, hoarse and choked:

"Let me in there! Find me an opening! I tell you I shall go mad!"

"Foolish young man!" exclaimed the Voodoo, sternly, and no longer able to keep him back from the bars. "You cannot get into that cell for it has no entrance down here. I must remind you that you, too, are a captive in this house, and if you seek to harm Victor Bramont—who is the exclusive prisoner of Helen Varcla—I may promise you that you will fare badly at other hands than his. Peace, I say!"

"I must have my grip on the throat of yonder villain!" cried Franz Edouin, maintaining his fierce and futile assault upon the bars. "There is a great mystery in what I have heard. I bear the scar of a red crescent in the palm of my right hand! I was released from the Orphan Asylum at Chichester four years ago! This man must be the murderer of my mother, and Dorian Ray must be my father! I have been near marrying the daughter of my father, who is my sister or half-sister, and so commit a crime which all the mercy of God will not excuse! Let me get at this man and compel him to speak!—for he alone may be able to clear up the tangle of what I fear. If my discoveries forbid me, by the laws of Heaven, to wed with my adored Osalind, then will I tear the very vitals from your carcass—scoundrel Bramont! You shall speak, I say, if I have to prod your tongue with red-hot forks! Open a way for me, Voodoo! open!—or every block of stone will I dig out with these nails of mine! Devil Bramont! murderer of my mother! I will reach you presently!" and he wrenched and fought at the bars like a man possessed by a hundred avenging rages.

Bramont, startled and, for a moment, in fear of his life, maintained an exterior of dogged coolness, though he exclaimed, behind his teeth:

"*Diable!* then I was correct in my suspicion. Here is the son of the woman I poisoned, and who, by that unlucky speech of the actress, has discovered himself to be the son of Dorian Ray. At this rate, the whole secret will come out, unhelped by me. *Sacre!* Then these foes of mine, having no further use for me, will leave me to die of snake-bites, or strangle me, or dispose of me in some other horrible manner. My life must be saved. I must run risks of catching them all by the hip some other time. Let me devise means to escape from them, and once free, we shall start another battle at cunning. Yes—*diable!*—my life first, I will speak to them."

And aloud he snarled:

"Hollo, there! Voodoo! actress! Grapple with that madman! I will tell you what you ask, but upon one condition."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF DE VIN.

DORIAN RAY sat dejectedly on the edge of a rude couch, in a dismal cell of the *Conciergerie*. His limbs were heavily manacled, and a long chain, attached to the handcuffs on his wrists, hung and trailed upon the floor at his feet. Had he been a very murderer his confinement could not have been made more ignominious; but it was no cause for wonderment, when men more illustrious than he were similarly incarcerated and insulted by the execrable leaders who at that time inflicted punishment upon no other excuse than that of a personal grudge against their unfortunate victims—a fact which caused Archbishop Darbov, himself then a prisoner at the mercy of the Commune, and whose cold-blooded assassination was fast being plotted, to protest eloquently against the tribunal whose authority cast so many helpless and reputable men into the cells of the *Conciergerie*.

The head of the artist was bowed and his eyes downcast, like one who only too fully feels and shrinks from the hopelessness of his situation—hopeless, indeed, for Philip De Vin—who stood near by and seemed to gloat unlimitedly at the other's sad discomfiture—has just said, with stinging emphasis:

"Aha! my friend Ray. I think it will be to stand against the wall and be shot by a file of soldiers, when you go out of this prison!"

"Not a file of soldiers, but a platoon of murderers, all arch-villains, like yourself!" retorted the prisoner, sullenly.

"You compliment me," sarcastically. "It has come to the ears of the Commune," again pricked the malicious tormentor, "that Dorian Ray is, in reality, a spy of the Versailles government—"

"A lie!"

"You cannot prove that, even if I gave you the chance. Ha! ha! *Parbleu!* I suppose you

know the penalty? Eh? The jury of Accusation will make very short work with your case!"

"Yes," said Dorian Ray, "you are planning monstrous revenge, because I sought to save my daughter from your clutches. Have a care, Philip De Vin: God's own good time will bring retribution upon the heads of all such men as you!" the latter prophecy which was slowly but surely fulfilled, as the *finale* of the wild, unholy record of the Paris Commune has proved on the pages of history.

"When you are dead, Monsieur Ray," pursued De Vin, tauntingly, "I will compel the fair Osalind to marry me—ha! take care there! If you once raise those chains to strike me, I will drive the point of my sword through your body! Do not forget that you are chained to the floor by a chain only five feet in length; and while you sprung vainly about, I could pick you to pieces with my weapon, and you could not strike back! *Parbleu!* I am not a fool to give you a chance at my life."

"Leave me—detestable shapel! If I am to die because of the false charges you have circulated against me, at least allow me the peace of solitude, in which to prepare my soul to meet the God your image desecrates—"

"But I have told you that you need not die. Accept the proposition I tendered a few moments since, and I solemnly promise that I will aid you to escape to Versailles. Think, if you die, I will possess your Osalind still the same. If you live, you will have a chance to see how happy I will make her," the last with a grim smile and tone almost a sneer.

"Were it not well for me to gain time with this rascal?" Ray thought, questioning. "He has asked me to influence Osalind in accepting him for a husband, and promises me a road of escape not only from the *Conciergerie*, but also from Paris. Ah! he cannot deceive me—dog and liar!"

"Let me acquaint you with another motive I have for ordering you to be shot, Monsieur Ray," said De Vin, sharply.

"What, save the brutal passions of a man-devil to degrade my poor child?"

"Your memory will perhaps recall a time, something like twenty years ago, when you were forced to fly from England."

Dorian Ray started as if stung to the quick. Slowly he raised his head, and the eyes of the men met in a moment of silence.

"Well, what next?" questioned the prisoner, doggedly, his head again drooping and his gaze bent on the hard, bare floor.

"You had an acquaintance whom you called a friend. His name was Victor Bramont."

"Curse that name!" burst involuntarily from the lips of Dorian Ray.

"He forged a note, gave it to you, persuaded you to indorse and negotiate it for him—telling you that he had received it from a second party, whose indorsement it also bore. This Victor Bramont pocketed the money; you only escaped a term of penal servitude by instant flight—"

"Then you, for one, Philip De Vin, know that I was innocent of intentional crime."

"True—but the court does not. To-day there hangs a sentence over your head which you only avoided when you returned to the death-bed of your wife, by becoming, or pretending to become, stark crazy. *Parbleu!* I think it was a trick."

"What has that affair to do with you?"

"Much, I imagine. The party upon whom the note was forged was an uncle of mine, and—*parbleu!*—I lost an admirable chance at inheritance, because the transaction ruined him. For depriving me of this chance, I hate you enough to hang you!" clenching his fist and snarling the last venomously.

"Why not vent that hate upon Victor Bramont, the true dastard in the deed? I believed the note genuine."

"To return to our mutton, Monsieur Ray. Live, and induce the beautiful Osalind to wed with me. Die, and I will have her all the same."

Dorian Ray well knew that De Vin did not boast idly in threatening to have him shot with almost no semblance of a trial, and possessing such authority, and stimulated by all the enmity of a craven nature he would eventually commit the cowardly deed. The horrible murder of Generals Lecomte and Thomas was still fresh in the artist's mind, and among such men of blood—defying the judgment of God and all the merciful laws of mankind—it would be an easy task to bring about the assassination upon the charge of collusion with the Versailles government. To gain time, now, was the object uppermost in the mind of this victim to Colonel Philip De Vin's base scheming, and trusting to the hope of faith in Providence, he said, slowly:

"Send for my daughter. Let her see my situation and hear of my prospective doom. Give us time for consultation together, and if she will voluntarily consent, on the face of all, to wed you, then her fate be in her own hands."

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed De Vin, beginning to experience a satanic glee at having, as he erroneously supposed, overcome the scruples of the artist. "But you must further aid my suit by urging an immediate ceremony."

"I will say no more," replied Ray, with a determined voice. "Send for my child, and we shall see—" he stopped short, finishing the sentence in his brain thus: "I shall see if she is a true woman, or a coward for her father's sake. If she be strong and reliant on Heaven, we will die together before this villain's very eyes. It is well that I have in my belt a vial, the contents of which can place us beyond the persecutions of both Philip De Vin and Victor Bramont. And aloud, he said: "Begone. You have had the only answer I will give, though you do your worst."

"I go," spoke De Vin, after a moment, a smile of menace round his lips. "But, mark well, Dorian Ray: unless your child consents to become my bride before daylight, you will be—*parbleu!* I swear!—you will be shot with the first gleam of sunrise. *Au revoir!*"

He wheeled and departed, his spurred heels thumping loudly along the grim passage without.

Dorian Ray sunk into a despondent mood; sitting silent, immovable, but thoughtful, in that solitary surrounding whose passive air was only broken by the boom of distant cannon and the bursting of shells that were now being thrown far into the streets of Paris by the Versailles troops. He was meditating upon the resolution he had taken, and once he inserted his hand in his breast, to finger the vial of poison which, in his desperation, he meant should release Osalind and himself from this last and unsupportable trial.

"Better death together," was his burning thought, "than the dishonor of this villain's triumph! Oh, life! what a page of sorrow you have been to me! Heaven pardon me for the deed I contemplate, and receive, at least, the suffering soul of my pure, sinless Osalind!"

Colonel Philip De Vin lost no time after leaving the cell of his captive. He procured a horse and started full gallop for the house of M. Achefort, bidding an escort follow him there with a cab. Jubilant De Vin! At last he almost felt the lovely person of Osalind within his polluting grasp, and in ecstasies fancied the reading of that solemn ceremony which would bind her to him forever. Diabolical De Vin! for his promise to spare the life of Dorian Ray was as false as his base nature could admit. To obtain his beautiful prize by the aid of the father was admirable enough, in that it would probably save him much trouble in overcoming any obstinate resistance on the part of the maiden; but to set free the prisoner at the *Conciergerie* was an experiment he really dared not undertake, as he was now responsible in person for his safe-keeping, the Commune having fully entertained the charges set forth by De Vin, that Dorian Ray was a spy for the Versailles. And, too, if Ray was free, it might occur, at some future date, that his undying hate would prove disastrous to De Vin's now dawning prospects of unhallowed joy.

"*Parbleu!* no!" he muttered. "Once the fair Osalind is mine, I will see to it that Dorian Ray dies the death of a dog!"

On he thundered and clattered, finally arriving before the house of M. Achefort.

Fastening his horse to a ring in the pave, he bounded expectantly up the stairs—but hesitated with a feeling that all was not right, when he reached the door of the artist's studio. This door was closed and the key was upon the outside. A trial of the knob discovered the door to be locked. With a thrill of apprehension he forced an entrance, and paused abruptly upon beholding the French girl on her knees in the center of the floor, her head bowed low and face hidden in her hands.

Had there lingered any doubt in his mind of what had transpired during his absence, the attitude of the girl and a glance around—which showed him that Osalind was not there—at once told all.

"*Parbleu!* What!" he shouted, angrily, striding forward, and roughly shaking the cowering girl. "You are the prisoner, instead of she!—you have permitted her to escape—*miserable!* I may kill you for this!"

"Oh, *monsieur!* Monsieur De Vin!" she wailed, in accents piteous with terror. "Spare my good-for-nothing life! She was shrewd as a cat and quick as an antelope! But if you haste you will catch her! Even as you came up the staircase, she was turning the key in the lock! She is surely not yet out of the house! She cannot escape you! Ah! *monsieur!* I could not help it—on the cross, I swear!"

"*Parbleu!*" cried the enraged ruffian: "if she is gone so late as that I may overtake her. Search the house—you—while I keep watch below!"

He dashed full speed from the room, muttering curses on the delinquent French girl. The sound of retreating footsteps on the stairs attracted his ear, and believing it to be caused by the fleeing Osalind, he followed after with long leaps. In the last and lower story, and while half-way down the last flight, he caught sight of a fluttering skirt disappearing outside the door, which immediately banged shut.

"*Parbleu!* 'tis she!" broke from his lips, while he doubled the speed of his pursuit.

The next instant he was upon the pave. But

a moment too late for Philip De Vin. He saw his horse dashing away at a full run down Rue de Lafayette, and on the back of the animal a figure whom he recognized as Osalind Ray. At every leap of the horse he saw his prize slipping further from his grasp, and while he stamped and swore vociferously in all the interjections of his Parisian tongue, he suddenly felt a powerful gripe upon his throat which checked and choked his vehement blasphemy.

"What, ho, there!" he gasped, with a strangling breath. "Hands off! Who the devil are you?"

"I am Franz Edouin!" hissed that person, fiercely, into his ear. "At last I have my hand on your carcass, Philip De Vin, and shall bring you to account for attempting my life at Versailles, and for robbing me of my beloved Osalind!—or for trying to rob me!—and for imprisoning Dorian Ray! Scoundrel De Vin, I shall squeeze your life out!"

"Parbleu! not if I can help it!" snorted De Vin, struggling stoutly with his assailant, and then both tripped and rolled over the pave in a deadly embrace.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ESCAPE OF OSALIND.

OSALIND RAY did not recover from her deep swoon for some time after the departure of her lover, who, unknown to her, had made the exchange of rings. When she regained consciousness the French girl was seated near, occupied with glancing over the pages of a novel, and seemingly indifferent as to whether her charge was either insensible or dead; for though the girl had at first bestowed every attention, and exerted all resources toward resuscitation, she at last desisted abruptly and threw herself into a chair, exclaiming aloud:

"*Merci!* she must be truly dead. And, after all, is it not better that she should never again open her eyes than to become the victim—not the first victim—of Monsieur De Vin? Ah! what a wretch is he, I know full well! What is this? A novel—'Camille.' *Bien*, I shall read a little. And if she revives"—glancing at the still form on the lounge—"I will take pains to guard her well for my—yes, my master. He is my master, though I hate and fear to disobey him. But 'Camille,' and she commenced to read.

A slight noise in the direction of the lounge drew her attention from the book. Osalind was sitting upright, intently regarding the girl, and for a few seconds her eyes expressed the bewilderment of her brain as she tried to recall what had happened. Then she remembered all; the arrest of her father; the message conveyed when De Vin handed her the ring of diamonds, and whispered that Franz Edouin was dead. More; she readily perceived that the French girl had been left there to keep watch upon her and prevent any attempt to escape; for she, as well as her father, had fathomed the design of the Commune colonel, and realized that she was destined for a hateful alliance or horrible dishonor.

The eyes of the French girl sparkled with shrewdness, and her every outline of feature showed that she was a person to whom the maiden could not look for sympathy or assistance. Burying her face in her hands, as if to shut out her miserable situation and its prospects, Osalind sat bowed and silent, a picture that might have moved to tears.

"So, *ma'mselle* comes to herself again!" exclaimed the French girl, partly, as she closed the book and faced squarely about in her chair.

"Would that I had died!" sobbed Osalind.

"Oh! To die when so young and so beautiful! Wake, *ma'mselle*. You are in a sorry plight. You must prepare yourself to receive the gallant colonel, who will return, I think, before daylight."

"Oh, girl!" wailed the wretched Osalind, springing from the lounge and falling in a supplicating attitude upon her knees, "have mercy upon me, and aid me in escaping from this wicked man! You are a woman, like myself! The day may come when you, too, must beg what I now beg! Have you no pity, no sympathy in your heart?—that you would see me the victim to his brutality? I never harmed you! I will reward you! Help me in this frightful extremity and I will forever bless, and Heaven forever smile upon you!"

"*Ma'mselle* begs for impossibilities," was the cool reply. "I am the slave of the colonel—I am your jailer. I shall not permit you to escape, and lose my life in consequence. Oh, no!"

She was interrupted by Osalind, who stood up suddenly, with a strange stare in her eyes, and, for the moment, without a sign of sorrow in her face.

As she clasped and raised her hands in that appeal to one of her sex which any but the base would have answered with succor, she had made two discoveries: first, that the ring of diamonds was gone—and she knew that she had either placed it on her finger, or clenched it tightly in her hand, in the same moment of her fainting; second, that another ring—one she

recognized instantly as the property of her lover—was upon the third finger of her left hand. Often had Franz slipped that ring off and on the same finger, saying:

"I almost feel, darling Osalind, as if in doing this, I am toying with our wedding ring."

As intended, the sight of this ring conveyed the message that Franz Edouin was not dead and was somewhere near. The discovery, and the reaction aroused by the belief that he was watching over her, forced from her lips a short, hysterical laugh, and tears rolled from her eyes, while she turned her back upon the French girl, to gaze, unnoticed, and with blissful emotion, upon this token of Franz Edouin's near though unseen presence.

"Come, girl," she said, turning sharply, "you wish me to prepare for the reception of my unwelcome suitor, who considers midnight as suitable as noonday for a *tete-a-tete*. Come—to my chamber."

"*Merci!*" thought the guard-attendant, elevating her brows in surprise, "this is almost too quick a change." And aloud: "Arm-in-arm, if you please, till we are in the next room, so I can guard the door."

"As you please," remarked Osalind, proceeding from the studio arm-in-arm with the girl. "Keep close watch, Miss Prudence, for Franz Edouin, my lover, will presently arrive, and he will punish you for all this."

"*Ma'mselle* is mistaken," answered the other, confidently. "I have heard of Franz Edouin, the famous detective. If he is the lover of *ma'mselle* I feel sad. I heard a certain man tell Monsieur De Vin that he was killed at Versailles."

"Be not so sure of what you hear. I have proof that Franz Edouin is alive, for he exchanged rings with me within an hour."

"*Mon Dieu!*" flashed into the brain of the girl, as she cast a glance upon the ring which Osalind wore. "I comprehend. The man who stole the ring of diamonds must have been Franz Edouin, and by leaving another ring—which she knows was his—thus he has assured her that he is alive and will aid her. Should he return again, he will show me no mercy. I have no means to communicate this to Monsieur De Vin. There is serious trouble ahead. I have half a mind to let her go, then hide myself from the wrath of De Vin. I will decide that point in a few minutes. If Franz Edouin is alive, knowing what has happened, and should come again ahead of Philip De Vin, he may cut off my ears as punishment for keeping prisoner his lady-love!"

Entering her *boudoir*, Osalind leisurely set about arraying herself in handsome apparel. Perfect confidence in Franz Edouin enabled her to banish all further dread of Philip De Vin. She called upon the girl to dress her hair becomingly, to fix a pin here, a bow there, to lace her garters, and so on until the attendant half forgot the danger of her position, and, true to Parisian nature, entered with a lively zest into all the mysteries of the toilet.

"There!" she exclaimed, at last, smiling with satisfaction, "*ma'mselle* looks grand—perfect! What a lovely picture for Monsieur De Vin, when he shall come!"

"Let us return to the studio," said Osalind. "I hope your villainous employer will be satisfied with my appearance."

"Oh, he cannot be otherwise!" cried the girl, truly delighted with the seeming resignation of her charge; and arm-in-arm the two walked toward the studio.

Had Osalind been beautiful before, she was now a marvel to behold, in all that is regal in grace and lovely in form and feature. She dreamed not, as she swept right royally along the hallway, that in a very short time both raiment and figure would undergo an ordeal to change her almost beyond recognition. Hardly had they reached the studio, when a heavy foot-step sounded in the lower entry. Osalind's face grew deadly pale, while the black eyes of the French girl sparkled with anticipation.

"Ah!" thought the latter, "I am saved from the vengeance of Franz Edouin, for I think that is the step of Colonel Philip De Vin!"

But her smile and the sparkle in her eyes vanished instantly at a sudden and singular behavior on the part of her captive.

Osalind also believed the comer to be Philip De Vin; but in the same moment of dread caused by this belief, her intelligent brain suggested a bold, desperate plan for escape, upon which she immediately acted. She burst forth in a laugh of admirably simulated glee, clapping her hands like a child who feels the coming of a promised bounty.

"Tis he! Franz Edouin! Hear: at every second step, his boot scrapes the stair; his boots do not creak: it is a quick yet well-measured pace. I know all that by heart, for I have listened to the same a hundred times. Franz Edouin is here! Ha! ha! ha!"

"*Ma'mselle!*" cried the startled girl, "I am lost. It is now my turn to plead for mercy! Save me, I implore you!—save me from his anger!"

"Vile girl! You deserve that he should punish you severely. But see: I am more merciful than you. I will save you. Step behind that

picture, there, and, though you do not merit it, I will intercede and save—perhaps your miserable life!"

The girl turned obediently toward the picture indicated and took two or three steps that way.

"This one, *ma'mselle?*" And then she screamed: "*Mon Dieu!* I am tricked! She is gone!" throwing herself upon her knees in the center of the room, in which position Philip De Vin found her a moment later.

In the half-minute that the girl's back was turned, Osalind, swift as lightning, had slipped from the studio, transferred the key and locked the door. Wild with the hope of escape, she fled through the dark and narrow cross-passage mentioned in a previous chapter, gained the hall beyond, descended the back stairs, crossed again to the main stairs, and on, on, to the front entrance, increasing the speed of her flight as she heard pursuing steps above.

Gaining the outside of the house—and perceiving the horse tied to the pave—a new thought struck her. With nimble fingers she loosed the strap from the iron ring, springing into the saddle, and giving the animal a sharp blow with the flat of her hand, dashed off at a gallop. Free! Free from De Vin! was her only thought. Unless also mounted, he could never overtake that mettled steed bounding forward as though each limb was prodded by a spur of thorns.

Philip De Vin had the reputation of being a horseman of rare excellence, and when he rode it was upon the back of a spirited charger whose bit many other men would not have cared to handle. Not long, therefore, was this least in ignorance of the frail character of his burden. Before the second lock was passed, he had seized the bit between his teeth, and his course, dangerously swift before, now became a mad plunging run which threatened destruction to himself and rider.

Close on the heels of the runaway beast leaped another shape, the shape of a dog, large, slick and powerful, which made no effort to stop the fight, but kept close as a shadow. It was Belial, the huge dog of the Voodoo, whose presence and pursuit will be explained anon.

On plunged the mad, foaming horse, leaping a broken bus or a pile of rubbish like a thing with wings, and once over a barricade so high that to clear it seemed impossible, while the scattering soldiery behind it—many of whom were near being dashed to pieces by the iron hoofs—vented cries of mingled astonishment and alarm.

"Ho! I am near killed!" shouted one.

"A daring messenger, forsooth!" cried another.

"No—it is a runaway!"

"Shoot the horse!"

Several guns were discharged at horse and rider, and Osalind—shuddering, terrified, but still unhurt as she clung frantically to the animal's neck—could hear the bullets thud around her. The horse gave a loud snort of pain, as more than one ball pierced his flesh, and gathering strength from agony and fright, bounded faster on and on, till block after block seemed to fly past like a melting, shapeless series of shadows. Clear and echoing rung the clatter of hoof strokes on the night. The breath of the beast came deep and quick. On and on; now slower, until another ledlam of cries and gunshots caused him to strain his exhausted muscles to frenzied effort.

Osalind, white with terror and dumb with dread for the result, still clung with all her strength to neck and mane. A crowd of men, women and boys had started in chase, when, suddenly, her horse fell dead on the pave, and Osalind was thrown with terrific force, stunned and motionless, several feet ahead.

She recovered to find herself in a small, dingy room of foulest atmosphere, with two grotesque, villainous-looking men, who, as she opened her eyes, were conversing in a low tone.

"I have not yet told you, Jacoli, another of my secrets," said one, who was Pierre Plaque.

"What next, then, comrade?" inquired the second rascal, glancing toward Osalind, who had closed her eyes and was wondering into whose hands she had fallen.

"I not only know that this is the child of Selissa Gordon, but I also know that Selissa Gordon and Helen Varcla, the famous actress, are one and the same person. Oh! By the bones of the catacombs! I am a mine of secrets!"

To Osalind Ray, the words of the death-cart driver sounded very strange, for she knew that he must be alluding to her when he said:

"This is the child of Selissa Gordon."

Knowing that they must be speaking of that mother of whom she had no recollection, and understanding the English language perfectly, she maintained a semblance of unconsciousness and listened.

"If Selissa Gordon is Helen Varcla," said Jacoli, "that much of it is good. But where to find this Helen Varcla?"

"Yes, but there is more. Since she left the stage, I have seen her but once, and that was about a month ago, here, in Paris."

"Paris is a large city, comrade."

"Oh! Still I can find her," pursued the fertile-minded and secret-holding Pierre Plaque, ogling his large one eye wisely. "There is a

woman in Paris who knows everything, if report does not lie."

"Who is that?"

"Xlmo, the Voodoo!"

"Oh, I see!"

"I am going to her—now—this minute—"

"But it is near midnight."

"By the bones! What care I for that? I must find Helen Varcla without delay, and get the promise of a pile of money—a big pile—for producing her long-lost daughter. Guard her as a treasure. Oh! have an unsleeping eye upon her. Now I'll be off. Eh? Let me see if that crowd is outside."

Pierre Plaque threw wide the door and stepped out. To his surprise, not a soul was in sight. Perhaps there were those in the approaching crowd who knew the abode of Pierre Plaque and had no desire to make themselves prominent with the Death-cart driver.

Pausing to close the door, Pierre wriggled away in the gloom, rubbing his skinny palms together, cracking his knuckles, and grinning with gay anticipations.

Jacoli, after the departure of his companion, took a long draught from the whisky-bottle, and then turned to have another look at the maiden—turned and recoiled, while his hair rose on end.

Osalind was in a sitting posture, with one hand resting on the head of the largest and most ferocious-looking dog Jacoli had ever seen. The great, bloodshot eyes of the dog were fixed upon him with a baleful glare, and as he licked his chops in a way that seemed to say:

"Be about your prayers, quickly, for I mean to have a feast off your carcass in a minute or less!"

While Pierre Plaque had glanced about him for signs of the recent mob, leaving the door open, Belial, the dog of the Voodoo, had glided into the room, and now planted himself before Osalind in the attitude of a champion whose battle with an adversary meant death to the latter.

"Tell me," demanded Osalind, addressing the astounded and thoroughly frightened ruffian, "are you my friend or my enemy?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRICE OF A SECRET.

THE announcement from the lips of Victor Bramont, that he was willing to impart the information desired by Helen Varcla, though upon certain conditions, caused both the actress and the Voodoo to grapple with Franz Edouin—aided by the muscular Zabach, who now took part in the scene which he had heretofore witnessed in silence and with folded arms—and while the combined strength of the three forced him away from the grated window, the Voodoo exclaimed, angrily:

"Franz Edouin, you are a fool!—first, because you cannot get in there; second, because I have told you that Victor Bramont is the prisoner of Helen Varcla, and must not be harmed by you. If you continue to give us this trouble, we shall have to tie you down again with knotted ropes!"

"Yes! Bind his arms and bag up his head—the madman!" cried Victor Bramont, drawing near to the grated window, and grinning sardonically at Franz Edouin, as the latter stood helpless in the hands of the others and glared like a tiger upon the villain beyond his reach.

"Never fear, scoundrel Bramont, but I shall yet twine my fingers round your windpipe!" hoarsely retorted the aroused detective; and then: "Release me. I see I cannot get at him, so I will bide my time."

"*Sacre!* Tie up the lunatic!" urged Bramont, now laying hold upon the bars and leaning forward until his long, white, pointed nose protruded beyond the bars, over his slick-ended mustache and grinning lips.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than Franz Edouin, again free of limb and arm, took one tremendous bound forward, and his fist, like a solid shot, struck Victor Bramont squarely between the eyes, knocking that person over and backward in a complete summer-set.

"*Sacre diable!*" he roared, springing up, but remaining away from the grated window, where Franz waited for an opportunity to repeat the blow; and with lightning quickness he hurled a small, sharp-bladed stiletto at the young man's head. Franz dodged the missile, which broke, with a thud and a ring, upon the opposite wall of the passage.

A low, chuckling laugh came from the Voodoo, who said:

"Now, Victor Bramont, you are completely at our mercy. I know well that you never carry but one weapon, and that weapon a knife. In your thoughtless rage, you have disarmed yourself," and again she chuckled.

"Come," interposed Helen Varcla, with an impatient gesture, "all this is time wasted. Proceed, Victor Bramont, with your answer to my question. Where is my child?"

"Ho! Not so fast, I imagine. You forget, there was to be a condition."

"True. Name it."

"You are to spare my life and allow me to depart."

"When I have recovered my child, through information you may give, I am willing to forego my vengeance," assented Helen Varcla, promptly.

"And if you make this restoration—giving, besides, a detail of this particular crime you have carried on for so many years—I am willing that you should be released, although I had sworn that you should die," also agreed the Voodoo.

"By Heaven! you are too ready to treat and trade with this fellow!" exclaimed Franz Edouin. "He is the murderer of my mother, and, by all the laws of the just, I am entitled to a voice in his trial and disposal!"

"Silence, gabbler!" snarled Bramont. "That is an affair for you and me outside. *Diable!*"

"Franz Edouin is right," said Xlmo. "As Victor Bramont is the prisoner of his mother, the son should take part in our decision. Franz Edouin wants this man's life, for which he cannot be greatly blamed. Let us step aside and consult together." She beckoned the others to follow, leading the way a few feet from the grated window, where the actress, the Voodoo and the detective proceeded to discuss, in low voices, a compromise over the fate of villainous Victor Bramont.

Bramont, confident that he would regain his liberty as the price of information which he alone could give, and not much disconcerted by the threats of Franz Edouin—only so far as to meditate a terrible vengeance for the blow dealt by the young man—calmly awaited the result of the conference. He felt that, once a sacred promise given by the Voodoo and the actress, to restore him to freedom, he could rely upon such a promise; and they must agree to his terms, for upon no less a condition would he speak what he desired; more, they dared not kill him while his secret remained unspoken.

While he contemplated his surroundings with a feeling of uneasiness and disgust—the disgust augmented by sounds of unceasing squirming, hissing and rattling from the cages of deadly snakes—he also stoutly believed that he would soon be at liberty, for he was the prisoner of Helen Varcla, and she, in order to recover her child, would disregard the wishes of a hundred Franz Edouins.

During the few moments in which his captors were debating upon his proposition, his brain was active with a plot to counter-foil the defeat which would be his when he revealed the secret sought by Helen Varcla, and he muttered, behind his long-ended mustache:

"No doubt I can easily turn the tables upon them—these three—if I can but find a certain man who is now high in authority in the Commune. That man is Philip De Vin, whose uncle lost money by my forgery of the note which compelled Dorlan Ray to fly from England. De Vin, the nephew, knew that I was the true forger. To stop his mouth, I shared the proceeds of my speculation with him. *Sacre!* yes. I will find this Philip De Vin. I will have the house of the Voodoo razed about her ears and herself guillotined for a witch! Helen Varcla I will have banished from France, and obtain, by some artifice, this child of hers! Franz Edouin I will have shot as a spy for the Versailles! Ho! *Diable!* Wait until I am free! Wait until I can find Philip De Vin, who is, I know, a big gun among these devil-Communists, ready for fire, plunder and death!"

It did not require many minutes for the trio to effect an understanding in regard to the disposal of Victor Bramont. They presently reappeared at the grated windows, and the Voodoo, acting for the others, said:

"Victor Bramont, two of us are willing to accede to your proposition as it stands."

"Good! *Sacre!*"

"But one is not."

"Ho! In counsel, the majority wins!"

"Not wholly in this case, as you shall hear," the Voodoo informed him.

"Oh, 'not wholly.' *Diable!* Go on!"

"Give us a detail of the crime, and the whereabouts of Selissa Gordon's child. When we have recovered the child, you will be placed in a large, square, empty room in this house. Franz Edouin will be placed there with you. Both will be armed with the American bowie-knife—"

"Ho! This grows interesting. *Diable!*"

"If you can, at the expiration of half an hour, come to the door of that room and demand to be released—after first passing your knife over the transom—then you will be allowed to depart, provided that you will leave France forever. Do you consent to this?"

"*Diable!* yes. For I shall cut off the head of that dog, Franz Edouin, in much less time than half an hour! Ho! I consent with great satisfaction! Do you all swear, by the cross, that this understanding shall be faithfully carried out?"

"We do," answered the three.

"Good! *Sacre!* Now you shall hear the detail you make such a fuss about!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CRIME OF VICTOR BRAMONT.

WHEN Victor Bramont so readily consented to the arrangement which Xlmo, the Voodoo,

expressed, it was far from his intention to give Franz Edouin or any one else, an opportunity to carve, slice and hack his body with the deadly weapon known as the American bowie-knife. In a moment of silence which followed his last speech, his brief thought was something like this:

"If I can get rid of these cursed beings for some time, I may effect my escape and see Philip De Vin, a man who will aid me in almost any deed of revenge! They think I have disarmed myself, because this Voodoo knows my love for the stiletto, and I cast a stiletto at the head of Franz Edouin. But I came to Paris well armed. In each of my boots I carry another stiletto, and with two stilettoes and plenty of time, I may dig my way out of this abominable hole. *Diable!* Give me time!"

The others attributed his silence to an effort to recall the past, in order that he might recite, link after link, the secret which Helen Varcla would have torn his very eyes out to obtain, and which forms a portion of the plot of our story.

Presently Victor Bramont began drawing out each sentence with a studious slowness that indicated a desire not to have to repeat or interpolate during the brief recital.

"Now listen," he said, gently stroking and twirling his luxuriant mustache, and gazing thoughtfully down at the hard, earthen floor. "Listen, I say. Twenty-two years ago—*diable!* or thereabouts—Dorlan Ray and Gertrude Somebody were married. I had nigh forgotten her name, though I fancied, once, that I loved her. You know, I imagine, that Ray, about three or four months after, was compelled to fly from England. Within the same year, Gertrude Ray gave birth to a child—a boy. You want all this in detail, you said?"

"Yes. Go on," replied the Voodoo.

"One year later—that is, after the birth of the child—Selissa Gordon—afterward Gordon—married the jeweler, and within the same year she had a child—a daughter. The child of Ray was then two years old. Follow me closely. Gertrude Ray had written to notify her husband of the birth of her son, but I, being an inmate of the house, intercepted the letter. *Diable!* I intercepted several letters. Subsequent letters were all read by me before they went to the mail-bag, and if any contained allusion to the child, I consigned them to the fireplace. I say I had fancied that I loved Gertrude, and, mad with rage because of her marriage with another, my plot for vengeance began by bringing Ray into a difficulty which made him an outcast. I also read letters from Ray, and if I saw fit, I permitted them to go to Gertrude. I finally made advances to her—suggesting an elopement, or something as delightfully romantic—when she threatened to have me kicked from the house—or something as delightfully emphatic. *Sacre!* That was the last straw. I then hated her. I began a system of slow poisoning—"

"Monstrous devil!" exclaimed Franz Edouin.

"Silence, there!" snapped Bramont. "I am telling a tale that is to save my life, and you want the detail. You shall have it. *Diable!* yes. After a time—and when Gertrude Ray, from the effect of the slow poison, was confined to her bed—I grew tired of that kind of play, and resolved upon a culminating stroke. I placed an unusual dose in her medicine prescribed for her by an ass of a physician, and forced her to swallow it—"

"*Sdeath!* How can I tamely listen to this!" burst from Franz Edouin, in a breath of indignant horror.

"I had written to Dorlan Ray that same morning—in view of my intention to kill at once the woman I had loved and hated by turns—continued Bramont, reflectively, "informing him that his wife was stricken with a fearful illness and could not possibly survive. When I gave the last fatal dose, Helen Varcla—or Selissa Gordon—from an adjoining room saw me, though too late to prevent the deed and its result. Gertrude Ray was dead in five minutes. Selissa Gordon—*diable!* Helen Varcla, as you call yourself—pursued me from the house and across the garden. It was her intention to have me caught and hung, no doubt! I grappled with her, choked her, left her lying on the sward. Perhaps she remembers the grip of my fingers?"

Helen Varcla made no answer. Bramont continued:

"But, the fact of her knowing that I had poisoned Gertrude Ray made it necessary that I should hide myself—which I did effectually, you may depend. *Diable!* yes. And Selissa Gordon—half-glad that the woman who had robbed her of Dorlan Ray's love was dead—did not care for unpleasant notoriety by hunting me down. Dorlan Ray returned in time for his wife's funeral. But his mind was completely gone. His grief had made a wreck of him. When they spoke to him of his child, or some hinted that his wife must have died by foul means, he only laughed—an idiot's laugh—and seemed not to understand. He was forthwith confined in a private asylum—the only thing which saved him from trial and conviction and a sentence to the penal colony. Very lucky for

him that he went crazy! Nearly two years passed. During that period I had greatly changed in appearance. Further disguising myself, I returned to the scene of my clever exploits, under the name of Saul Secor. I formed the acquaintance of a rascal by the name of Pierre Plaque—*diab!e!* as great a rogue as myself. He loved gold immensely. He had a wife by the name of Catherine—another rascal! *Sacra!* I think that we were all three pretty well matched," and here Bramont cast a grinning look of significance upon the Voodoo. "Well, I had conceived another plot. Having visited Dorlan Ray at the asylum, I discovered two things; first, he had almost recovered his reason; second, he was still ignorant of the fact that he had a child. I told, and impressed him, that his wife had died in giving birth to a fine, healthy female infant, and that I had charge of the infant, which was then about two years old. I also took pains to impress upon his mind that the authorities only waited for him to be of sound brain—according to medical certificate—when they intended trying and punishing him for the crime of forgery. *Diab!e!* I frightened him, and I also made him think, for the time, that I had innocently negotiated that unfortunate note myself. He knows me better, I imagine, in the years that have passed since. It was finally agreed that we should take the child and flee the country together. Mark, now: I had no child, for the child of Dorlan Ray was in an orphan home at Chichester. I must get a child. I had already planned for it—and a piece of revenge upon Selissa Gordon for pursuing me through the garden on the night I poisoned Gertrude Ray. By artful devices, Catherine Plaque obtained the position of attendant and nurse in the employ of Selissa Gordon, who, subsequent to the death of her husband, which occurred a few months prior to that date, had adopted the stage name of Helen Varcla. I think I am right. Now, it was agreed that this nurse should meet me in the cellar of the house occupied by Helen Varcla, and give into my hands the child of her mistress. I was to pay in this plot, one hundred pounds to Pierre Plaque, and fifty pounds to his wife. At the appointed time I met the nurse and received—no, I did not receive, because she had met me there to tell me that she had begun to dearly love both the child and its mother, and would not give the child up to me—"

"Place that to my credit, Helen Varcla," said the Voodoo, gravely.

"I was determined to have my prize," went on Bramont. "I stabbed her, snatched the child from her and fled! *Diab!e!* As I fled, I heard her say: 'I will not die, Victor Bramont, but will live to kill you!' With my assistance, Dorlan Ray escaped from the asylum, and we departed instantly and forever from England, bearing Selissa Gordon's child with us. When we reached Paris, and while I stood beside the crib of the stolen child—which Ray innocently believed to be his own child—I made him promise that when the child reached its nineteenth birthday she should become my wife, in case I had not previously married. To-night is the nineteenth birthday of that child. I came to Paris to claim fulfillment of the contract. I said I would be on hand at half-past ten—impossible now. *Diab!e!* What time is it? Hal! hal! Helen Varcla, your daughter is my promised bride. If I mistake not, she lives directly opposite this house. Find her, and have a merry-making. Then let me get at this Franz Edouin, that I may give him a taste of the American bowie-knife! *Diab!e!*"

Franz Edouin, overcome by greatest amazement, stared at the bold, snarling Bramont. The revelation of the villain so plainly indicated that he, and not Osalind, was the artist's child, that there seemed no room for doubt. The Voodoo showed little, if any, surprise. Helen Varcla—as we shall continue to name her—stood silent, half-incredulous, immovable.

"I believe that this man has spoken the truth," said Ximo, when Bramont had finished his recital.

"Then, if he has spoken truly," exclaimed the actress, in a half-whisper, while her head drooped as if she pondered upon what she had heard, "if this be so, I will love again, and never hate Dorlan Ray, for surely he has been good to my child."

"We can very soon settle this matter," here spoke Franz Edouin, with a business-like ring to his voice. "Let us at once see Dorlan Ray—my father—and see what will be the result when he discovers that Osalind is not, and I am his child. How can you, Helen Varcla, recognize your child?"

"That is easy," replied Helen Varcla, immediately. "She has an unmistakable birthmark—an ace of diamonds on the left side of her neck."

"Be sure, then, that Osalind, the supposed daughter of Dorlan Ray, is your child. I have noticed that very birthmark a hundred times, in my wooing. Come. We shall see—" but he paused in his speech.

Until that instant he had quite forgotten that Dorlan Ray was a prisoner in the hands of the terrible Commune, and this, and the recollection of the jeopardy in which he had left his be-

loved Osalind, came upon him so suddenly that his blood almost ceased to flow.

"We cannot now see Dorlan Ray," he half gasped, proceeding to explain, briefly, the danger to the artist. "But, since you are my friends I will tell you that Osalind is now a prisoner in her own rooms, and guarded. I may bring her here—to the arms of her mother—for safety," and turning to the tall, powerful mulatto: "Your name is Zabach. Come with me to the house of M. Achefort. I may need the aid of a man before I return. Come."

"Lead," tersely answered Zabach.

The two men started for the house of M. Achefort.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MYSTERY OF BLOOD.

FRANZ EDOUIN and the mulatto delayed not a moment. As they emerged upon the gloomy path before the entrance of El Bibou, the great dog, Belial, met them and followed after. At the gate Zabach said, addressing the dog:

"Be faithful here until I return."

It was at this juncture that Osalind appeared in the doorway of the house of M. Achefort. A momentary gleam of light shone full upon her face, and, instantly recognizing her, Franz Edouin sprang forward with her name upon his lips. But so intense was the excitement which possessed her, that she either did not hear, or did not understand the voice of Franz Edouin; and while he was running toward his betrothed—unseen by her in the gloom of the night—she bounded into the saddle of the horse which De Vin had left standing at the pave, then galloped away at a mad pace, never casting a glance behind nor hearing the second cry from her lover bidding her come back.

"Great Heaven! what can she mean?" burst from the astounded lover, who halted and strained his eyes after her. "I know that she has no experience in the management of a horse, and that wild ride may be her death! Zabach!"

Zabach had recognized the maiden, both by that transient gleam of light and the cry uttered by Franz Edouin. Immediately impressed with a sense that all was not right, and acting upon a sudden impulse, he spoke to the huge dog in a tone of quick command, pointing toward the receding horse and rider.

"Belial—follow! Bring that woman!"

The intelligent animal, without a sound, darted from the gate, and swift as an arrow sped forward in pursuit of Osalind.

In the same moment, Philip De Vin came hurriedly from the house of M. Achefort. The same gleam of light which had shown Franz Edouin his betrothed, also discovered the identity of the man who was evidently pursuing her. Muttering an exclamation of almost savage pleasure, he sprang toward the villain and would-be destroyer of his happiness.

"At last—at last!" and into the ears of De Vin he fiercely hissed: "I am Franz Edouin! At last I have my hands upon your carcass, Philip De Vin!—and shall bring you to account for attempting my life at Versailles, and for robbing me of my beloved Osalind!—or trying to rob me!—and for imprisoning Dorlan Ray! Scoundrel De Vin! I shall squeeze your life out!"

The struggle which ensued was no child's play. De Vin, finding himself engaged with a man he had supposed to be dead, and for the report of whose death he had paid liberally, and knowing that he could not expect mercy at the hands of the champion of the maiden he had persecuted with base importunities, fought with demoniac fury, and twice succeeded in inflicting smart wounds upon his tenacious adversary, with a knife which he invariably carried in his breast.

The terrific conflict, which must have ended in the death of one of the combatants, was terminated by a kick from Zabach which rendered De Vin partly unconscious.

"Who is this?" he asked, calmly, when De Vin was overcome and bound securely with a scarf which Zabach wore.

"It is the scoundrel, De Vin! The very man who imprisoned Dorlan Ray, and who would dishonor the woman I adore! Better to have let us fight it out for his death or mine!"

"No—better as it is. We shall keep him as hostage for the safety of Dorlan Ray."

"What would you do?"

For answer, Zabach swung Philip De Vin up onto his shoulder, very much like a man carrying a sack of flour, and tottered back toward El Bibou.

"You have no use for me now," he said, to Franz Edouin; and to Philip De Vin, he said: "Be silent, or I may have a notion to let you fall and dash your brains out on the pave!"

Franz Edouin stood alone, looking after Zabach, and wondering what to do in his dilemma. The cause of Osalind's flight was plain to him. But whither had she gone, even admitting the possibility that she could control the spirited animal which she rode? A visit to the rooms of the artist could accomplish nothing now.

"At least," he concluded, "I can see some of my older brothers—tried friends and many—in the detective service. By our united efforts, I may discover the whereabouts of my beloved

Osalind. I must forget all else in my endeavors to find her. Nothing can be attained by standing here like an idle boy with his hands in his pockets."

He started off at a brisk walk, but had scarcely taken a dozen steps when he met a man tottering and staggering from side to side, as if beastly drunk with wine. Thinking it was but a reveler reeling blindly homeward, he stepped aside, that the fellow might pass. But the man paused, with a giddy lurch, stared bewilderedly into the face of the young detective, then cried, in husky accents:

"Franz! Franz Edouin! I am dying!" and fell forward helplessly into the arms that instantly outstretched to receive him.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Franz Edouin. "Dorlan Ray! Can it be you?"

"Yes! Dorlan Ray!—wounded to death!—dying! Help! I suffocate!"

"This way! Let me hold you—thus! Merciful Father! what is all this?" for he saw blood upon the artist's face, and as he supported him onward felt that his clothes were also saturated with blood.

Exerting all his strength, Franz Edouin fairly carried the artist to his rooms, so luckily close at hand. The French girl had disappeared. Placing Dorlan Ray, now insensible, upon the lounge, the young man hastened to ascertain the nature and extent of his wounds, and render every assistance in his power.

"Oh, for some female hand here! What fiendish murderer's deed is this?" he cried, pausing in his task and checked for breath, shuddering as he contemplated the ghastly sight which his examination revealed.

The face of Dorlan Ray was bruised and swollen; hair matted over a gory wound; hands and clothes dyed with blood. In the side, above the hip, was another wound, evidently from a rifle-ball.

It seemed to him that the motionless figure was already dead. A feeling of sick horror seized him, and for a moment he buried his face in his hands, to shut out the bleeding spectacle.

The cause and mystery of the artist's fatal condition were to be explained to him within a few minutes. As he returned again to his knees and stanch the gaping wounds, the clock on the mantle-piece struck the hour of twelve.

CHAPTER XIX.

BRAMONT MEETS WELCOME COMPANY.

AFTER the departure of Franz Edouin and Zabach, the Voodoo addressed Victor Bramont:

"For once, villain," she said, "I believe that tongue of perjurous blisters has spoken truly."

"*Diab!e!* yes. In a few moments Franz Edouin will return with the supposed child of the artist, and that child is the daughter of Helen Varcla, who stands there!"

The mind of the actress was in a strangely tangled mood. Thrills and feelings of emotion coursed over her nerves and into her veins till it seemed that one more drop of gladness would be too much. The keenest, yet most delicate of a mother's sweetest anticipations, caused her full bosom to heave and throb with fervid eagerness. Each passing second fed fresh heat to the giddy, wearing expectations which flashed and chased in gleesome quickness across her picturing brain; indeed, it was as if, by some acutely pleasant and mesmeric influence she was plunged in the midst of a short but delightful dream, born of the conviction that soon she might clasp and kiss and possess forever the child for whom she had sought and struggled vainly during seventeen torturous years. Whatever misgivings might have arisen as to the possibility of Osalind being easily reconciled to the sudden change of parents, she banished them as evil imps of useless shadow within this almost overpowering joy.

At the same moment in which she dwelt upon the blissful reunion in prospect, her heart also melted toward Dorlan Ray, the man for whom she had cherished nothing but hatred since the day of his marriage to Gertrude, twenty-two years previous; and another and happy thought—that once more the old time feeling of mutual regard might be revived—came upon her and whispered of a resurrected flame whose ecstasy would smother every bitter memory of the past. So much for Helen Varcla, one of those remarkable women governed by extreme impulses of resentment and contriteness, combining the passions and bravery of a man with the ever-living tenderness of her sex, who could forget the disappointment of her early and first love, and fancy a double joy in store in the meeting with her lost child and that child's now beloved protector. It was while giving herself up to this twofold delight that she murmured a second time:

"Yes, I will love again, and never hate Dorlan Ray!"

"Ho! I imagine so. Second-hand kiss, though!" put in Bramont, who overheard the lowly-uttered words of the actress.

The harsh, sneering voice aroused Helen Varcla from her momentary dream, and also aroused all the quick fire in her nature.

"Have a care!" she warned, with flashing eyes. "Your life has been spared for the crimes you have committed in the past. That will not grant you immunity for what you may say or do now—"

"His life is not wholly guaranteed," corrected the Voodoo. "He has yet to meet Franz Edouin with the American bowie-knife."

"*Diab!e!* yes. Let me get at him," snarled Bramont, apparently eager.

"Now, Victor Bramont, you will prepare to be led to that room I have spoken of, where the duel is to take place."

"Oh, 'prepare'! What am I to do, witch?"

"You will place your back to this grated window, and pass your hands through behind you, that I may bind them."

"And how am I to fight Franz Edouin, or anybody else, with my hands tied behind me? *Diab!e!* I am no fool!"

"Do not alarm yourself. You will be loose in good time."

"*Sacre!* unfortunate turn!" murmured Bramont, behind his teeth. "I did not expect this. I have all along suspected that there was some other outlet to this abominable hole, besides that cursed trap-fall; and if left to myself, being safe from these squirming snakes—I might have discovered it. But, then, I may find a better opportunity in the room they intend taking me to. I hope so."

"Come!" exclaimed the Voodoo. "I will not waste time with you. And as to escape—as if she understood his very thought—"be sure you will have no chance for that. Now, if you will glance out here, you will see that I place my foot upon a spring in the floor—thus. The spring connects with a rod, and the rod supports the bottoms of my snake cages. At a single pressure of my foot, the rod falls: the next moment every snake in yonder cages will be let loose. We may safely watch your death-agonies from this window, which has a shutter of woven wire—as I show you; so that your cell will be one large cage, and you will be gradually stung, bitten, crushed and poisoned to death by every species of deadly serpent it has been my good fortune to secure in a dozen years—"

"You promised to spare my life!" yelled Bramont.

"Obey me now, and the promise will be kept. Disobey, and those dozens of deadly snakes shall be let loose, to mangle, bite, destroy—"

"Enough! *Diab!e!* Here are my wrists—sorceress!" and backing to the window he presented his wrists, which the Voodoo quickly and securely bound with a piece of cord produced from her pocket.

Having deprived him of the use of his hands, she made him stand back, and as he obeyed, a portion of the seemingly solid wall—operating upon noiseless hinges by a secret and powerful spring known only to the Voodoo—swung slowly inward, disclosing an upright aperture about two feet wide.

"Now, Victor Bramont, come out; and recollect your finger. In case of trouble, I may shoot off another finger, or an eye, or an ear with this same air-gun," and she held the death's-head cane for a second under his nose.

Bramont had forgotten his wounded finger during the conversation which transpired at and after the moment when Xlmo first flashed in the light upon him from the grated window. As he obeyed the summons and stalked forth into the narrow stone passage—giving one glance at the death's-head cane, and another glance at the short, sharp sword which he perceived, for the first time, that Helen Varcla carried—he removed the handkerchief from his finger and discovered, with much satisfaction, that there was but a small portion of the skin shot from the tip, giving the wound more of a resemblance to an ugly bruise, and this had ceased bleeding after saturating the bandage. Replacing the handkerchief, he followed the Voodoo, and was himself followed by Helen Varcla, who carried her sword in readiness to smite off his head in the event of any resistance.

"*Sacre!*" thought the helpless villain. "When I am in the room they will toss to me the American bowie-knife, and with it I will hack my way out in a very short time. Once free and armed with my stilettoes—for the stilettoes will be too frail for hacking and gouging wood—I can fight my way out of the house. Get out I must. This Franz Edouin may know how to use the American bowie-knife in a deadly way. Oh! be sure I will not allow him the opportunity to stab me, whether he can do it or not!"

But the words of Xlmo, uttered even while he thus thought, again seemed to indicate that she knew what passed in his mind.

"When Franz Edouin returns, he will meet you and throw to you a knife with which you must fight for your life. By the terms of our compromise, he will not take advantage of you unarmed."

Bramont ground his teeth in a rage of disappointment.

"*Sacre di ble!*" he resolved. "Then, with one of the stilettoes which I carry in my boots, I will stab my enemy, Franz Edouin, upon the instant that he puts his head through the doorway!"

Xlmo led the way to a room in the upper and rear portion of the building, the door to which was very thick and locked with a monstrous key. Opening this door, she thrust the prisoner forward, and Helen Varcla, according to previous understanding, aimed a cut at him with her sword which dextrously severed the cord from his wrists.

Turning the key the two women hastened away. Had they lingered, they might have heard a double exclamation, like this:

"Hullo! *Pubeu!* What are you doing here, Victor Bramont?"

"*Diab!e!* You are Philip De Vin! The very man I want to lay my eyes on!"

Philip De Vin lay in one corner of the large, bare room, tightly bound hand and foot. Bramont, overjoyed at this unexpected meeting, paused not to ask the cause of the other's presence and condition, nor to explain his own. By the fact of De Vin being bound, he saw that they were alike prisoners of the Voodoo and had a common interest in escape. Snatching from one of his bootlegs one of the stilettoes before alluded to, he sprang like an agile cat to the side of the prostrate man and slashed off the cords and scarf which bound him.

"Get up! *Sacre!*" he cried, in a shrill, hissing voice. "We must escape. And then—revenge! I have been wishing to see you! Ho! Let us loose; then, down with the Voodoo!—down with the citizens!—down with the detective! Two men armed with stilettoes, and desperate! *Diab!e!* what a host. Let us see about this door! Ho! come on, here, Philip de Vin!"

"*Pubeu!*" echoed De Vin, savagely, "if I am safely out of this, I will hang, or gallows somebody, or forfeit my spurs! Ha! Look! Escape is easy!" and he pointed to the top of the door.

But the discovery by De Vin must wait until we see what was transpiring below, in the ante-room of the Voodoo, while the two men were busy availing themselves of the means of exit from their prison.

CHAPTER XX.

PIERRE PLAQUE AND THE VOODOO.

WHEN the actress and the Voodoo returned to the reception-room, they were met at the door, outside, by Zabach. He nodded toward the door and made a sign which Xlmo knew meant that some one waited to interview her.

"Who?" she asked, handing him the lamp, which he replaced in the calf's head over the door.

"Pierre Plaque."

"Ah! the Death-cart driver. What can he want? But I shall ascertain that directly."

"Stay," said Zabach, detaining her as she was about to pass in. "A word of the daughter of Helen Varcla."

"Of my daughter! What is it?" exclaimed and asked the actress.

"There will be a delay in finding her."

"What has happened? Speak," groaned Helen Varcla, startled by the grave manner of the mulatto.

In a few sentences Zabach told what he and Franz Edouin had seen, and Helen Varcla groaned again, wringing her hands in an outburst of distress.

"No!—no!" she cried. "It cannot be that now, in the very moment of my joy, I am to be so suddenly robbed of the sweetest hope of my life! In the name of Heaven! can nothing be done? Oh! my child! She must be recovered, if she is alive, which I fear is impossible!"

"I have set Belial upon her trail. I think Franz Edouin has started in pursuit, though blindly. We can do no more at present."

"True; nothing more," agreed the Voodoo. "We will hear from the dog, be assured," and turning aside, she passed into the ante-room.

Helen Varcla saw that nothing could be accomplished until the return of Belial, in whose wonderful sagacity she had great faith. Smothering the impatience of her brain, and forcing her shocked nerves to quietness, she silently followed Xlmo.

It was an unlucky oversight that Zabach did not inform his mistress of the capture of Philip De Vin, and the latter's imprisonment in the same room to which the Voodoo had consigned Victor Bramont. The mulatto had locked up De Vin and gone to answer a summons at the front gate, while the two women were busy with Bramont at the window of the snake-cell—the cellar of the building. And time enough had elapsed to enable Pierre Plaque—mounted on his new and swift horse, whose stable was close to the abode of the Death-cart driver—to reach *El Bibou* at the moment when Bramont was being locked in the room with De Vin. The horse was now tied to a ring in the pave, and stood steaming, sweating and quivering, for Pierre had ridden him like a madman, so eager was he upon the errand which contained visions of gold.

The Death-cart driver sat cross-legged on one of the luxurious ottomans, dangling and swinging his cone-shaped wooden cap with an air of self-importance and complacently surveying the rich appointments of the room. Immediately upon perceiving that the actress accompanied the Voodoo, and recognizing her as the very woman he was seeking, he exclaimed, in a cracked voice:

"Oh! By the bones of the catacombs! I called Xlmo, the Voodoo, to ascertain the whereabouts of Helen Varcla, and, as if she smelt the odor of my mission, lo! here is Helen Varcla already before me. Tell me, madam fortune-teller—to the Voodoo—is this Helen Varcla in person?—or have you, knowing why I came, produced a spirit to resemble her?"

"What is your business with me? What have you to say to Helen Varcla?" demanded the Voodoo, planting her death's-head cane forward and fixing a weird stare upon her visitor.

"Oh, as for that," said Pierre, independently, while he uncrossed and recrossed his legs and gave his cone-shaped cap a nonchalant twirl, "I came to see you to find Helen Varcla. Having found her, I wished to say: 'Helen Varcla, your name was once Selissa Gordon; you lost a child, about seventeen years ago; I know where that child is—a daughter—and can bring her to you—the child now being a beautiful maiden, and having a birth-mark, an ace of diamonds, on the left side of her neck. But, for this I expect to be well paid. By the bones! I think there is no one in all Paris able to do what I can in regard to the child of Selissa Gordon, who is Helen Varcla.'"

At the speech of Pierre Plaque, the actress took a quick step forward, and would have said:

"Man! speak your secret. Any sum you may name shall be yours, if you can place my child safely in my arms!"

But the Voodoo, divining her intention, checked her before she could speak.

"Retire to my laboratory, Helen Varcla. Let me deal with this man. I think he will be glad to tell all he knows, and not charge a franc for the service."

Alone with Pierre Plaque, the Voodoo continued:

"Now you will proceed," in a significant way.

"By the bones!" chuckled Pierre, "this woman is mistaken if she supposes that she can pump me for nothing!"

"We will use the English language, Pierre Plaque; we are more familiar with that."

"Very good. I like plain English."

"You shall have it—very plain. Now, mark me: I have been intending to give you into the hands of Philip De Vin, whom you attempted to assassinate twenty years ago."

The face of Pierre Plaque suddenly became of an ashen hue, and his small one eye snapped in startled glitters.

"Ho! what's this?" shot athwart his astonished brain. "They say that Xlmo, the Voodoo, knows everything. Truly, she knows that I attempted the life of Philip De Vin twenty years ago or thereabouts. By the bones! She is a witch! How could she have learned that?"

"A man by the name of Victor Bramont forged a note, for which another man, named Dorian Ray, was made to suffer," pursued the Voodoo. "The man who lost heavily by that forgery was an uncle of Philip De Vin's. De Vin knew who the true forger was, and Bramont, suspecting this, hired you to stab the only witness who could injure him."

"Oh, you know all about it, I see. Where did you get it so pat?" squeaked Pierre Plaque, who was growing exceedingly uneasy under the stern stare and half-bisped words of the Voodoo woman.

"At that time, Pierre Plaque, you were a member of a secret organization among the thieves of London. I may also digress to say that you are a member of a similar gang in Paris. The hailing-sign of this latter gang is given thus—by grasping the tongue between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, and laying the palm of the left hand upon the crown of the head, the translation of which is: 'If my tongue betrays you, my head is forfeit!' The authorities are on the look-out for this gang, and I can expose you if I wish. Now, in your attempt upon the life of De Vin you were aided by one of the London society of thieves. Fortunately for De Vin, your knife-blow was not true. Fortunately for you, De Vin does not know the name of the man who attempted his life, nor could he recognize the face, because you then wore a mask. Colonel Philip De Vin is now high in power in the Commune. What if I say to him: 'Behold! Here is the assassin who aimed a knife at your heart nearly twenty years ago, in London!' You will be dragged to your death in your own Death-cart. What a fine spectacle terminating the career of Pierre Plaque!" and the last words were hissed shrilly forth, as she took a sudden and menacing step forward, drawing back her death's head cane as if she meant to give him a poke in the ribs, or grasp his thin throat in her talon fingers and shake off his diminutive head.

Pierre Plaque seemed to have lost his speech. His large one eye ogled round and round, and while he stared hopelessly into the flaming eyes of the Voodoo, he thought:

"By the bones! What manner of witch is this? Right: if she tells Philip De Vin that mine was the hand to seek his life, he will have my head piked on the nearest barricade! I begin to think that I was a fool to call upon this Xlmo, the Voodoo at all—"

"What have you to say now?" she interrogated, with such startling suddenness that Pierre Plaque rolled from the ottoman and scrambled into a corner of the room, shrinking as far as possible from her, and regretting that she stood between him and the door.

"Now, Pierre Plaque"—advancing another step—"I know that Osalind Ray, the supposed daughter of Dorian Ray, the artist, is the daughter of Helen Varcla, whose true name is Selissa Gordon. I know that she fled from her home on a horse of dangerous spirit. I venture that the horse has carried her to your house. She is there now. You have recognized her by the birth-mark of the ace of diamonds on the left side of the neck. You anticipated making money by the discovery. I now say to you, Pierre Plaque, that if you do not immediately bring to this house the daughter of Selissa Gordon, I will deliver you up to Philip De Vin and he will have your ugly body quartered in the presence of a mob!"

"By the bones of the catacombs!" loudly squeaked Pierre, waving her off, for she had taken another menacing step toward him. "Keep the secret of the past! I will obey—yes! But tell me, first, how you know so much about me?"

"I am Cat'rine Plaque!" declared Xlmo.

An astounded cry burst from the thin lips of the Death-cart driver, and this was echoed by another cry outside the door, a cry of agony, and in the voice that uttered the second cry, Xlmo recognized her faithful servant, Zabach. With one one bound she reached the door, and was just in time to catch and sustain the falling form of the mulatto, from whose neck spurted the blood of two ghastly cuts.

"I am stabbed to death!" he cried. "Avenge me! It was Philip De Vin and Victor Bramont!" and with these words the guggle in his throat told that all hope of life for him was past.

At the same time the front door was heard to bang shut.

CHAPTER XXI.

ESCAPE OF BRAMONT AND DE VIN.

SCARCE a minute elapsed between the utterances of the cries—the cry of astonishment on the part of Pierre Plaque and the cry of agony from Zabach—and the death of the mulatto, who, with his last breath, named the murderers. It was so sudden and unexpected that Xlmo could not immediately realize her burden to be a piece of lifeless clay. Then, as the fact of the actual loss of her faithful servant broke upon her, all the fury of that nature which many Parisians had known, felt and dreaded, caused her eyes to flame, her respiration to hiss through dilating nostrils, and the working of her features rendered her appearance so demonaical and startling that Pierre Plaque, timidly regarding the tableau in the doorway, muttered slowly:

"Yes, it is she! I have seen her enraged many times before this, and it is not safe to be near her. She becomes thoroughly insane, and is apt to bite, scratch and kill anything or anybody she can reach. By the bones! I wish, as I wished a moment since, that I had remained away from this wife of mine, who has turned herself into a Voodoo sorceress, and whose death, long ago, I had believed in and thanked the Lord for!"

And Helen Varcla, attracted by the cries, and gazing on from between the curtains to the laboratory, said to herself:

"People have called this woman a devil-witch! Truly, if this is one of her moods, I would much rather encounter a wild beast than to be the cause of her wrath. In her rage, she is hideous!"

The Voodoo dragged the dead body of Zabach to an extended ottoman, and having deposited it there, she wheeled and advanced upon the Death-cart driver with a gesture as if she meant to devour him.

"Tell me!" she screamed, "am I not right when I say that I believe the daughter of Selissa Gordon to be now at your house? Speak—reunegade!"

"By the bones of the catacombs! she is at my house!" hurriedly squeaked Pierre Plaque, terrified by her loud piercing voice and the threatening, clawing motion of her talon fingers.

She uttered a shrill, savage exclamation.

"I see it all, then! Quick, Helen Varcla; there's no time to lose! Victor Bramont and Philip De Vin, both seek your child! By an accident they must have been confined in the same room, and by chance have effected their escape! They have heard enough, at that door, to tell them where to look for Osalind, the supposed daughter of Dorian Ray! How came you here?" the last abruptly to the Death-cart driver.

"On a horse, and he is swift as the wind!" hastened to answer Pierre Plaque, who thought he understood the meaning of the Voodoo, and desiring to save his villainous neck from the vengeance of his enemy, Philip De Vin, by doing her all possible favor.

"Take his horse, Helen Varela, and fly to the rescue of your daughter!" and in the same breath she gave directions to find the abode of Pierre Plaque.

Instantly acting upon the command of the Voodoo, the actress ran from the house. But there was no horse at the pave, and she glanced helplessly about her.

"Oh, for a horse—a wagon—any thing that will carry me to the rescue of my child!" she cried, and even as the words left her lips, a mounted cannon came rumbling along, drawn by two horses trotting briskly. The course of the artillery piece was toward *Place de la Bastille*.

Without pausing to ask its destination, or without even asking permission of the drivers, and heedless of the speed at which horses and cannon were going, Helen Varela threw herself onto the carriage and clung to the seat like a veteran of the corps.

The maid, Annette—who had, by an order from her mistress, in company with Zabach, who guarded her safely past Belial, returned to the house of *M. Epont* when Franz Edouin, Ximo and Helen Varela started to interview Victor Bramont in the cellars of *El Bidou*—was just then gazing from a window, and saw the act of the woman she was sure was her mistress, which caused her much wonderment.

"What can be the meaning of all this?" she questioned herself. "But a moment ago I saw two men mount a horse, over there, and ride swiftly away; and now Helen Varela rides after them upon a cannon. Oh! Is it possible that Victor Bramont has escaped, after all, and that my mistress is in pursuit? She will not let him get off easily, I am sure!"

The discovery made by Philip De Vin, in the large, bare room, was that transom over the doorway which the Voodoo mentioned when stipulating that Victor Bramont could have his life and liberty if, at the expiration of half an hour's confinement with Franz Edouin, he was able to demand to be released—first surrendering his knife by passing or throwing it through that same transom.

The door being very high, the transom was beyond reach of a leap. Nor was there any means for climbing, as the lock of the door was imbedded invisibly in the stout, riveted wood, and the interior had no knob; showing that the apartment had been arranged for the express purpose of serving as a prison.

But with two men, venturesome, desperate and fertile in expedients, the mode of escape was easy. In less time than it requires to relate it, Philip De Vin—who was the smaller and most supple—had climbed upon the shoulders of Bramont and grasped the sill of the transom. Squirming cautiously through and dropping to the floor outside, he turned the key which the Voodoo had left in the lock. Silently as two cats the pair stole forward through the darkness—a darkness which enveloped them almost immediately upon leaving the doorway, for the sole light of the room from which they had escaped was given by a very small lamp set in a shelf-niche, a lamp that was constantly kept burning by the Voodoo.

"*Diab!e!*" exclaimed Bramont, in his throat, after a moment. "There is a light ahead! It is the same door through which I was once carried to-night!—I know it by the calf's head."

"*Pa bleu!* Tread careful, there," warned De Vin, as they began descending the stairs, for both distinctly heard voices in conversation beyond the partially-opened door.

The speakers were the Voodoo and Pierre Plaque. The two men reached the door just as Ximo said:

"Now, Pierre Plaque, I know that Osalind Ray, the supposed daughter of Dorian Ray, the artist, is the daughter of Helen Varela, whose true name is Selissa Gordon. I know that she fled from her home on a horse of dangerous spirit. I venture that the horse has carried her to your house. She is there now!"

Instantly De Vin exclaimed, in an audible whisper:

"Aha! *Parbleu!* Now then, my Osalind, I know where to look for you! I shall lose no time in recapturing you, once I am out of this devilish den!"

And Bramont, simultaneously:

"*Diab!e!* My Osalind has run off and is at the house of a man named Pierre Plaque. Good! I must lose no time in finding the house. *Sacre!* I must have my Osalind!"

In the same second each felt an iron gripe upon the collar, and starting round they beheld the stern visage of the mulatto, Zabach, who held them like a vise. Simultaneously, as if with a single thought, each one struck a terrific blow with the stiletto which, all along, had been nakedly gripped by nervous hands.

"*Diab!e!*" snorted Bramont, as he gave a savage thrust.

"*Parbleu!*" hissed De Vin, burying his blade to the hilt.

The blows were aimed to kill, and Zabach staggered, mortally wounded, giving vent to that echoing cry which caused the Voodoo to spring to the door just in time to catch his falling form.

They wrenched themselves free and fled. Making unceremonious appropriation of the horse which Pierre Plaque had left tied to the ring in the pave, they mounted and galloped away.

But there had been a mutual discovery in the words uttered by each, when they exclaimed together at the door of the Voodoo's anteroom; and De Vin, who sat behind, was thinking:

"Hullo! *Parbleu!* This man—Victor Bramont—is also after Osalind Ray! If he is my rival, why should I not stab him now, while I have a fine opportunity, and thus be rid of him forever?"

Acting upon the thought, he cautiously drew back the stiletto, intending to bury it in the ribs of the seemingly unsuspecting Victor Bramont.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SURPRISE OF BRAMONT.

VICTOR BRAMONT was too shrewd to be unaware of his dangerous position in riding before Philip De Vin, for, in a strain very similar to that in which the murderous thoughts of De Vin ran, he muttered:

"*Sacre!* This will never do. In my haste to escape from the sorceress Voodoo, I have placed my life in the hands of Philip De Vin, by allowing him to ride behind me on this horse. He, too, is after Osalind Ray—my Osalind. *Diab!e!* The fellow may take it into his cracked head to give me a sly dig with the stiletto with which I—fool!—armed him."

The horse was galloping forward as ferociously fast as his double load would permit, and at the moment when Bramont finished his muttering they were passing a bright lamp at the corner. Casting a side glance at the shadow on the pave, produced by this light, he was startled at seeing, very distinctly, an arm of the shadow of the man behind him drawn back and motionless—for it was then that De Vin had decided to strike that blow in the ribs which would rid him forever of the man who was his friend a short time previous, but whom he considered his deadly enemy now.

Discovering his danger by the fortunate shadow on the pave, and acting with lightning quickness, Bramont gave the rein a sudden and powerful twist, causing the horse to take a tremendous, sidelong, lurching bound. De Vin, totally unprepared for any such performance, toppled from his seat as though stricken with a club, falling with a thud which stunned him for several minutes.

"*Diab!e!* I am rid of him!" exclaimed Victor Bramont, digging his heels into the horse's belly and dashing off at increased speed.

A few blocks further on, he turned into a narrow court and reined in his stolen horse—with a jerk that brought it to its haunches—directly before a restaurant of lowest reputation, whose existence he had discovered by a dull-burning light over the greasy entrance.

Sounds of bacchanalian revelry issued from this place, boisterous with low songs and drunken whoops. Dismounting he passed the door and paused in the midst of a rough assemblage with fierce faces and riotous doings.

"Hello, here!" he shouted, loud enough to be heard, at the same time casting a handful of silver among them. "Who can tell me where to find a man by the name of Pierre Plaque?"

"Oh, Pierre Plaque is the Death-cart driver! Everybody knows him!" answered one fellow, with a maudlin voice, while several others were scrambling for the money which this new-comer scattered so lavishly.

"*Diab!e!* But I want to find out where he lives!" and another handful of silver glittered in the air, falling, jingling and rolling, upon the floor.

Under ordinary circumstances, Bramont would have been considered a madman, to throw away his money thus; but he had an object in view, and the people he addressed were too soaked with wine to think of anything but the fact that this visitor had brought a shower of silver pieces with him, which they lost no time in gathering.

"Oh, as for that, *mon ami!*" said one, more sober than the rest, "for a couple of francs I will undertake to show you the way."

"*Diab!e!* I want a dozen men to show me the way. Each man must have pistols and a knife. A louis apiece to all who serve me the way I wish!"

A hoarse shout of readiness burst from the throats of all. It was not difficult to find men armed in the manner Victor Bramont had stated. Since the sacking of storehouses in the Rue St. Dominique and on the Boulevard de Latour-Maubourg, there were few inhabitants who were not fully equipped with guns, pistols, swords and other weapons. Even the *garcon* who received orders for refreshments wore a belt bristling with revolvers and a bayonet.

In less than five minutes a squad of a dozen men were in line upon the pave, with Bramont at their head, and by his side the ruffian who had volunteered to show the way to the abode of Pierre Plaque.

"Forward!" ordered the fellow, flourishing a pistol, and the squad advanced with soldierly tread.

"What means that sound?" asked Bramont, as he heard several whistles, before, behind and elsewhere around him.

"Nothing," answered his ignorant companion.

"All sounds are common in Paris now."

But when they had traversed another block, Bramont said:

"Now, tell me what that means?" for he noticed another series of sounds, first like the hoot of an owl, then like the caw of a crow, then like the note of a nightingale.

"As I told you, all sounds are common in Paris now," was all the fellow answered, as he led on to byways and unfrequented routes.

"Now then!" ground Bramont between his teeth, forgetting the whistles and bird-calls, "with these same thirteen cutthroats—thirteen as black-faced rascals as ever I saw—I shall capture my Osalind, the prize for which I have waited seventeen years, and who must now be a beautiful maiden! Besides, they shall aid me to burn down the den of that sorceress Voodoo! Also"—and his teeth glistened in a grin of devilish exultance—"they shall, by my order, strangle Franz Edouin, if we are lucky enough to find the dog of a detective! *Diab!e!* I have cheated him of that pleasant little game with the American bowie-knife! Before I sleep this night, I shall clasp the lovely Osalind in my adoring arms! *Sacre!* How delightful! I could dance in my abundance of joy! Ha! ha!"

They were not long in reaching the abode of Pierre Plaque. Door and windows were tightly closed, and there was no sign of life within.

"He is asleep, *mon ami*, or else out upon business with his infernal Death-cart," said the leading ruffian, glancing over the front of the small house.

"Hark ye!" spoke Victor Bramont, to the vagabonds awaiting his orders. "Pierre Plaque is out, I know. But there is a person inside whom I desire to possess. That person is my promised bride—a maiden. She is the captive of Pierre Plaque, and, doubtless, he has left her well guarded. If it comes to a fight, are you prepared for it?"

"Yes! Fight!" was the response of these men, always ready to do anything for money.

"Good. Now, I shall make that door open. Watch." And advancing to the door he delivered a volley of kicks, crying: "Open. *Diab!e!* Open, I say!"

Contrary to the expectations of Victor Bramont—who really looked for violent resistance to his demand—the door swung wide open. Helen Varela stood upon the threshold, a sword in each hand, her

wonderful eyes flashing and both muscular arms bared to the shoulder, in readiness for combat.

Bramont uttered a sharp cry of astonishment, followed by a yell of terror; for the moment the door was fully open, a large, ferocious form shot through the air, and a pair of massive snarling jaws closed upon the cloth and flesh at his throat.

It was the dog, Belial. As Bramont staggered and struggled in the tenacious and terrible gripe, he managed to shriek.

"Ho! *Sacre di ble!* Kill her! Kill him! The woman and the dog! Fire! Kill! Ho!"

The reports of thirteen pistols rattled and rung upon the still night air, and while their echoes filled the street, Helen Varela, unharmed, sprang into the very midst of the ruffians, slashing right and left with her two swords.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WHISTLE OF FRANZ EDOUIN.

COLONEL PHILIP DE VIN quickly recovered from the effects of his fall, and after venting a dire imprecation upon the head of the man who had so cleverly outwitted and discomfited him, and shaking his fist at the deserted air of Rue de Lafayette, he started on a half run toward the nearest prefecture.

He knew that Victor Bramont would hasten to the abode of Pierre Plaque and attempt the capture of Osalind—attempt her capture, because, like Bramont, drawing his conclusions from the words of the Voodoo, he reasoned thus: Osalind was not the child of Dorian Ray, but of a woman named Selissa Gordon, whose assumed name was Helen Varela; Pierre Plaque had the maiden in his power; the object of the visit of the Death-cart driver to the Voodoo, was to ascertain the whereabouts of Helen Varela and demand a goodly sum of money for the restoration of her child. This being the object of the cunning Plaque, it was not likely that he would give his prize the slightest opportunity for an escape, and perhaps had left her strongly guarded by one or more of his ragamuffin associates.

Victor Bramont, then—argued the wily colonel—would not undertake to effect so valuable a capture without adequate assistance; hence, if he, De Vin, would wrest the beautiful and persecuted maiden from the guard of Pierre Plaque and the probable confederates of Bramont, he must have a force at his command sufficient for the annihilation of both.

It was with the last idea revolving uppermost in his mind, that he made all haste to the prefecture, which had lately received special facilities for electric communication with the various headquarters of that vast military organization which the Commune termed the legitimate National Guard, in whose rabble ranks the notorious Eudes was figuring prominently.

No time was lost in flashing over the wires a message to send a score of cavalymen to a certain point not far from the abode of Pierre Plaque; and rubbing his hands in satisfaction, he started away to meet the detachment, in company with two renegade soldiers of the line who had been commissioned as officers since the insurrection.

"Our destination," he remarked, in a loud tone, confidentially, "is the abode of the Death-cart driver—that worthless and abominable creation of the Deferate of War."

"What is there in that direction?" asked one, stepping out briskly to keep pace with the impatient De Vin.

"*Parbleu!* my comrade. The daughter of Dorian Ray, the artist—my promised bride—is there, a prisoner."

"Oh! But why the need of so much force? Pierre Plaque, for fear of his rascally neck, would not dare refuse to give her up to Philip De Vin."

"Walk faster. And look to your weapons. I will explain." And, as they went, De Vin proceeded to relate the cause of his apprehension that a strong force would be necessary to accomplish his purpose.

As the three figures receded from the prefecture, the figure of a fourth man emerged from the shadow of a gate near by. Coming forward, the light of the lamp discovered the pale, anxious face of Franz Edouin.

"Kind Heaven receive my thanks for having permitted me to hear those words spoken by that scoundrel, Philip De Vin!" he murmured, gazing up at the starlit sky. "Never fear, but I shall be there, too, and we may try our strength on equal terms, before you dare touch the form of my beloved Osalind. This whistle"—drawing a peculiar silver whistle from his bosom—"I have not used since the bombardment by the Prussians. Many of its servants are dead—let me see how many are alive tonight!"

He placed the whistle to his lips and blew a loud, shrill call unlike any sound made by an ordinary instrument. Ere three seconds had elapsed, a gateway almost directly opposite was opened, and an answering call, exactly similar was given.

Franz Edouin ran to the man who stood at the gate and exchanged a few words with him. The two separated, going swiftly in opposite directions. Presently the whistle sounded again, then again, then several in concert, the number fast increasing until it seemed that Boulevard de Magenta, Rue St. Martin, and all the localities and by-streets in the vicinity of the *Embarcadere*, Prison St. Lazare and the Military Hospital were suddenly populated with significant whistles that warbled, chirped and echoed unheard-of notes in every direction, while here and there a solitary figure could be seen moving with a rapid and noiseless step through the ploom.

These were the whistles which first attracted the attention of Victor Bramont when he started to march with his thirteen hired ruffians from the miserable scene of debauch at the restaurant named in the preceding chapter.

Within fifteen minutes after the sound of the first whistle not less than thirty men were gathered near the *Chateau d'Oran*, and a minute later Franz Edouin was among them.

These men all wore large, black soft hats and a cape. Beneath each cape was a belt with a short sword and a brace of pistols.

The signal which had brought them together was one they had not heard since the victory by the Prussians, and was only used by certain leaders to intimate the necessity of an immediate concentration of a strong force of the detective service, or its various spies and deputies, in that particular section to which the signal seemed to be confined. By a re-

cord kept of the last call—though such calls had ever been infrequent—and by preconcerted arrangement, the rendezvous was known to be *Chateau d'Eau*. Had it not been for the reason that many of that section had perished during the siege, and others broken allegiance to the profession, the number answering to the summons would have been far more than thirty.

At the appearance of Franz Edouin, who now wore, brightly displayed upon his breast, a star of highly-polished silver, it was known, by the exhibition of the star, that to him must they look for an explanation of the sudden summons.

"Well, Franz," said one, advancing from the somber group, "we are indebted to you for this call—as I see by the star. What is the emergency?"

"My friends," replied the young detective, forcing a calmness which almost belied his features, "we, who are bound by the secret signal, even to graver duties than the allegiance of our office, are sworn to aid a brother—are we not?"

"Yes," at once.

"Listen. Who among you would hesitate to call upon me to aid you in defense of a mother or a sister from dishonor? What more precious, compared with either, than the promised bride—the maiden to whom a man's whole heart is given? Such a one—my own betrothed—is now, or soon will be, in the power of the meanest scoundrel who now wears spurs given by the Commune! He is high in authority. I ask not if you are for the Commune, or against it. There are, surely, some hearts of principle, even in these terrible times. This is a personal issue. I wish to save the maiden of my heart from dishonor. To do so may require battle and blood. Who will refuse to fight for innocence and purity, and make me a debtor forever?"

"Not I!" shouted all, enthusiastically. "Go on, Franz Edouin!"

And the man who had first addressed Franz said, grasping his hand fervently:

"Show us the service, Franz Edouin. There are many of us here who love to strike for innocence and right; and, by every pleasant recollection of the time when you and I have 'trailed' together, I will give my life to aid you!"

"Thanks, dear friend! Then come. Follow me, all!"

The young detective started forward, followed by thirty true, tried friends—men who had collared many a ruffian and faced the flash of a pistol—and though their steps were fast, still faster beat the heart of Franz Edouin, who feared that he might not be in time to defeat the designs of villainous Philip De Vin.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CALL OF PIERRE PLAQUE.

THE dead form of Zabach upon the ottoman lounge, at one side of the room; the erect, quivering, writhing figure of the Voodoo, in the center of the room; the cowering anatomy of Pierre Plaque, as the latter sank close to the furthest corner of the room; all formed a striking tableau of death, rage and terror, in the single minute of silence which prevailed after the departure of Helen Varela.

In that minute—while her blazing eyes were fixed intently upon the trembling Death-cart driver, and her brain was most turbulent with thoughts of vengeance upon the murderers of Zabach—the far-seeing mind of the Voodoo was grasping at conclusions and plans.

"Pierre Plaque—renegade!" she screamed, stepping forward and laying hold upon his shoulder and throat. "Many a time have I chastised you with a cart-whip, when you were foolish enough to awaken my anger!"

"Oh, I know that well!" chattered the terrified fellow, squirming in her talon fingers like an eel on a hook.

"But I have ever mercifully spared your life."

"Yes. But—by the bones!—you will kill me yet, with that gripe of yours! He! not so hard!"

"In the face of your memories, you would not dare to trifle with me."

"Not I! Ouch! A little mercy, I beg, for this shoul-der of mine!" and but for the iron gripe which held him, he would have sunk to his knees in the excruciating pain inflicted by that same gripe.

The debased life led by the Death-cart driver, backed and penitoned by villains who, at that period, glutted in reckless power and lustful intrigue, had created in Pierre a man of cunning and boldness when dealing with men, especially those whom he knew to be enemies of the Commune. His headlong pursuit of the daring Franz Edouin and Jean Arnold, on the Versailles road, in an early portion of our recital, was sufficient evidence of his brute bravery. In the present instance, however, his case was vastly different. The fact that this woman—who was once his acknowledged wife, and whom he had abandoned through absolute fear—had always been his master, and had frequently given proofs of her strength and rage by whipping him soundly—besides holding now, as it were, a halberd round his neck—resurrected every cowardly element in his nature, and caused him to pray fervently, as he wriggled and twisted helplessly, that he might, upon any terms, be allowed to escape with his wicked life.

"By the bones of the catacombs!" he vowed. "If you will let me off, I will serve you, skin, joints and blood!"

"Hear, then. It is very plain to me that Victor Bramont and Philip De Vin have mutually discovered, or will discover, themselves to be enemies in rivalry for the possession of Osalind Ray. Bramont, now that he is free, will make all speed to get her—knowing, by what he heard, at that door, where to look for her. This De Vin will try to thwart. Both, knowing that there will be a struggle, will go in force. Neither will lose much time. They may be going thither now. Helen Varela may not have reached her daughter, and if she has, cannot do much single-handed."

"Very true. Quite true—all of it!" promptly agreed Pierre Plaque, adding, inwardly: "And if you do not loosen the gripe on my shoulder and the gripe on my throat, I shall be a dead man before you are through with all this premise!"

"Hear—and silence! By the assassination of Zabach, I have lost the means of communication with my spies and others who could serve me in this business. The service I now require of you is,

that you arouse those thieves and rascals, in whose secret society you are a member, and instruct them to follow me for the rescue of that persecuted maiden, Osalind Ray; in the event of meeting armed opposition from both Philip De Vin and Victor Bramont, they must be prepared to fight. If you need money, let them look to me for it. Do you understand me?—renegade!"

"Oh, you are asking a slight service, compared with my readiness!"

"Will you do this, and save yourself from my wrath?"

"Yes. With delight. I will arouse and fill with fire every rascal I know, whether thief or gentleman! A million, forsooth! I'll be off at once!"

"I have no doubt you know a way to expedite my wishes."

"Oh, you may trust me!"

The Voodoo released him, and he shot through the doorway as if discharged from a gun, almost tumbling down the stairs in his extreme haste, for he feared that the Voodoo might alter her intentions in a second, and again lay hold upon him with those talon fingers, whose gripe was like the bite of a formidable pincer.

"Meet me at the Boulevards Lenoir and Prince Eugene. Fail at your peril!" called Ximo, after the flying, jumping, leaping Death-cart driver.

Pierre Plaque barely heard the words of warning as he darted from the house and ran, with nimble feet, down the broad entrance path, bounding out on the pave like a Jack from a box.

"May all the dogs of Paris make a meal on my bad luck!" he squeaked. "Oh, by the bones! my visions of gold!—where are they now? Where is my horse? Ho, if I had a horse, I could work faster. I remember! Helen Varela took it. I am bound to serve this devil—Voodoo—once my wife, whom I hoped never to meet again in this world!—else she will either deliver me to the revenge of Colonel Philip De Vin, or to the punishment of the authorities, for being a member of the worst gang of thieves in the city, or twist me into quarters, herself, for daring to disregard her command. She could easily find and capture me; for she has spies—I heard her say something about spies! By the bones! I am making money out of the Commune business, and I cannot afford to close my career while the harvest lasts. To insure my freedom and profits I must obey the Voodoo! Now then, for my friends, rascals and brothers!"

He ran on into the gloom, uttering, as he went, an admirable call like the hoot of an owl. This was almost immediately answered by a sound resembling the caw of a crow. Then the notes of a mocking bird, followed by the warble of a wren, the chatter of a parrot, the cry of a hawk and other similar noises that multiplied in the vicinity of Quai Louis, thence along the canal, gradually concentrating toward a given point. Crouching, skulking forms peeped around corners and out of shadows, like rats scenting a banquet and signaling each other before venturing from concealment.

These bird-calls—which so suddenly and singularly peopled the vicinity of the canal at the same time that the whistles, started by Franz Edouin, were assembling the force of detectives at Chateau d'Eau—were also noticed by Victor Bramont, it will be remembered, when he set forth to capture Osalind, with thirteen hired ruffians at his heels.

Pierre Plaque worked fast and earnestly, moving hither and thither, and presently his own Death-cart—for which he had dispatched a trusty associate—came almost noiselessly to hand, just as he, and a vast number of thieves thus summoned from their dens, poured forward to the junction of Boulevards Lenoir and Prince Eugene. So that while Helen Varela, ahead of all, was speeding to the abode of Pierre Plaque, on the seat of a cannon carriage—praying to Heaven that she might be in time to succor her child—the cavalry ordered by Philip De Vin, and the detectives led by Franz Edouin, and the horde of thieves aroused and employed by the Death-cart driver, were all marching rapidly with the same destination, by three separate routes, the presence and power of each force as yet unknown to the other.

Ximo, the Voodoo, was in waiting at the appointed spot. Leaping into the Death-cart, she cried:

"Now, on!—on to your home, Pierre Plaque! Lose not a minute! Have you paid these vagabonds for the service they may have to perform?" pointing to the men following, who were all armed with clubs, pistols and knives.

"By the bones! Every man ready to fight to the last gasp!" replied Pierre, starting his sable horse on a trot, while the thieves kept pace at a double quick.

The three strange processions of armed men would have attracted crowds had they transpired in the daytime or in early evening. It being now after midnight, and the sections traversed somewhat removed from the centers of turbulence agitating insurrectionary Paris, these processions continued their way with but a few curious persons to witness, follow and wonder at the cause of such a display.

It would not be long, now, before these different hosts would meet, and violent death was in store for many of them, in the dismal street where lived the Death-cart driver.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHARGE OF THE DETECTIVES.

WHEN Victor Bramont gave the order to fire—as at the end of chapter twenty-second—every shot was aimed at the ferocious dog, Belial, notwithstanding Bramont cried out to shoot both the dog at his neck and the woman in the doorway. Hence the fierce onslaught of the unarmed Helen Varela.

Many of the bullets pierced the faithful animal through and through, and some tore Bramont's clothing; but, though he received two or three smarting flesh-wounds, he escaped, by a miracle, any serious hurt, and as the dog dropped lifeless upon the ground, the fortunate villain sprang toward the wide-open door.

Helen Varela, surrounded by the swarthy ruffians, who, despite her prowess, were hard pressing her, saw, too late, the error she had committed in leaving her position at the doorway, for all her antagonists now seemed combined in the purpose to beat her further and further back.

While this unequal combat waged, Victor Bramont, at one bound, entered the dingy room. On

the floor, weltering in blood that flowed from a torn and lacerated neck, lay the body of the unfortunate rogue, Jacoli. At a far side, shrinking against the wall, her fair face white with alarm, was Osalind. At sight of her Bramont uttered a loud, inarticulate yelp of triumph.

"Aha! It is she! You are Osalind Ray, for whom I am searching!"

"Oh, sir!" cried the maiden, in piteous accents, "say that you are my friend! Aid me, I beseech you! I know not what to do—where to turn! I am a helpless girl, suffering more than you can conceive—"

"Diable! I am Victor Bramont!" he interrupted, with the voice of a fiend gloating over a beautiful prey. "I am Victor Bramont! And by a contract with your father, I am here to claim you for my bride! Ho! you are mine at last!"

A wild, despairing shriek rung from the lips of Osalind Ray, as she cowered further from this creaked man whose very name fairly froze the blood in her veins.

Simultaneous with her outcry, there arose a howl among the ruffians without the door, and in the same moment, while the clash of swords sounded with redoubled fury, and pistols cracked in quick succession, there were a score of shouts, the words of which were:

"Down with the assassins! Live, Franz Edouin! Death to all persecutors of innocence and purity!"

"Ho! Diable! What can be the meaning of that?" exclaimed Bramont, hastening to the door.

An unexpected sight greeted him; shown by powder-flashes and the bright lights from numerous windows that were now thrown open in the neighborhood, the inhabitants of the adjacent houses having been aroused from peaceful slumber by the sudden and loud din of conflict. Bramont's ruffians were being attacked on every side by a body of men wearing slouched hats and capes with blood-red lining—the lining displayed as the flaps of the capes were buttoned back over the shoulders, to give the arms free play—and each man wore a shining silver star upon his breast. While Bramont gazed in astonishment, he was confronted by one of the men, who cried:

"Scoundrel Bramont! I had not looked for you here!"

"Sacre! You are Franz Edouin, the detective!"

"The avenger of my mother, whom you murdered! Fight, now, for your miserable life!"

In an instant their daggers crossed, and they swayed, struggled, lunged and parried, gradually working away from the door, while Franz cried loudly to his followers:

"Let all keep off, and leave this wretch to me!"

Hardly had they left the doorway, when Helen Varela succeeded in regaining the step, where she held at bay a burly ruffian who had singled her for his especial adversary, and who appeared to be as adroit as the actress in handling the sword.

Blood streamed from several wounds in the bare arms of Helen Varela, and the left arm was rendered useless by a terrible cut on the back of the hand which wrought a ghastly and profusely-bleeding wound.

"Par Dieu! I cannot believe that I was born to be whipped by a woman!" snarled the fellow, pressing his attack with such skill that the actress, wearied with the duration of her first encounter, must soon have succumbed.

She made no retort. Her back was against the door-jamb, and the lightning circles of her sword barred entrance further.

In the surging and jostling of the combatants about them, Franz Edouin and Victor Bramont had become separated before either had received any wound of consequence. And almost at the same second that the ruffian made his confident boast, he uttered a wild scream of agony and sunk down from a knife-thrust in his back.

Franz Edouin, who had delivered the blow, sprang past the actress.

"Osalind! Osalind! Where are you?"

"Franz! Dear Franz! Oh! Heaven be praised!" and the lovers were clasped together in a passionate embrace.

"Who—what is that?" indicating the dead body of Jacoli.

"Dear Franz, I have heard to-night that which tells me I shall yet live to see and know my mother. The wretch whose body lies there, would have kept me a prisoner, for a purpose I do not yet comprehend, when I was championed by a strange but wonderful dog which slew him when he would have laid hands upon me. The dog was here a moment since, and seemed to know a woman whom I never saw before, and this woman came scarce a minute before the arrival of terrible Victor Bramont. Oh, her bright eyes, dear Franz! How kindly they beamed upon me! But before she could speak and tell me the cause of her coming, this fearful attack began. What is it? For I hear such curdling noises, and I know that there is death beyond that door!"

"Look up, darling Osalind! Soon all will be well. The mother who loves you, and whom you cannot remember, is even nearer than you suspect. Thank Heaven! I was in time to save you from the villain, Bramont!"

But Osalind heard not his last sentence. The strain of her abundant joy, after so much of trial, was overpowering. She swooned in his arms, and at the same time Helen Varela called, anxiously:

"Come here, quickly, Franz Edouin! This night's work is far from being over. Look!" and she raised her sword, pointing off along the street.

Tenderly placing the insensible form of his betrothed upon the rude settee, and pausing to imprint a kiss upon her pale brow, Franz Edouin hastened to obey the call of the actress. From his elevated position, he could see that which escaped the observation of the combatants in the street. The windows of the houses for a block either way were open and blazing with light, and just then great tongues of flame burst forth from an unoccupied dwelling near by—the work of some incendiary profiting by the disturbance and seeking an opportunity to plunder.

With plenty of light, Franz Edouin saw a body of cavalrymen dashing forward to the spot of contest, their sabers and gaudy accouterments shining and glittering, and at their head, urging them on, rode Philip De Vin.

"Go into the house and attend to your child," he

said, addressing the actress in rapid tones. "And as you are so very wounded, let me have your sword, for I lost mine in the *mêlée*. Close the door securely. There is bloody work at hand. Yonder coming scoundrel is even as desperate as Victor Bramont!" and armed with Helen Varela's sword, and holding ready his revolver, he placed himself in a position near the door, shouting a quick, loud command to his friends, the detectives.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAVALRY AND THE THIEVES.

THE detectives who fought for Franz Edouin and his betrothed—incited by every impulse which the cause of virtue could invoke—being in numbers far superior to the desperadoes of Bramont, were putting to flight the surviving rascals at the moment the thundering horse-hoofs of the approaching cavalry struck upon their ears. They turned at the command from Franz Edouin, whose words told them that a new and formidable foe was at hand, but they were men accustomed to danger and were not appalled by the prospect.

Bramont, who had himself been hard pressed, seeing that he had lost, at least for the time, the object of his visit to the abode of Pierre Plaque, called off his ruffians and gave the order for a precipitate retreat. Eight of the thirteen answered and obeyed his order, and with these, and muttering blasphemies upon his ill luck, he started on a run from the scene of his defeat.

"Follow!" he snorted, choking with the rage of overwhelming disappointment. "Follow me! *Sacre!* The end is not yet!"

True enough, the end was not yet. As they approached the corner, a vast body of men, many bearing torches that flared resinously, poured pell-mell across his path, with whoops and howlings that made the air fairly hideous. In front, and leading this crowd, was the Death-cart of Pierre Plaque; in the cart the erect form of Xlmo, the Voodoo, her right arm bared to the shoulder, over her shoulder and about her form a volume of light, sable garments, the right hand wielding a heavy mace of spikes, and her whole mien—with glaring eyes, glistening teeth, and now unlinked and disheveled locks whose bushy and raven opulence was like the unkempt hair of a cannibal—the personification of some terrible demon abroad in wrath to battle and destroy.

As the scene of the general encounter occurred midway in the block, with the crowd led by the Voodoo in front, and the already fiercely-contending forces in the rear, there appeared to be no avenue of escape for Bramont.

"Ho! *Diablo!*" he roared, astounded and alarmed by this unexpected predicament. "I fear I am caught again!" And to the men, who still stood stanch, he hallooed: "Look! You must fight for your vagabond lives! These, too, are your enemies and mine. We must cut our way through yonder mob! Stand firm, and hew and shoot them as they come! Now then!"

The Voodoo had recognized Bramont the moment she set eyes upon his prominent, frantic figure, and even as he addressed his men with that desperate speech, her voice rung shrill and loud above the din:

"I told you that I would not die, but would live to kill you, Victor Bramont!"

"Ho! That was what she said when I stabbed her in the cellar of the house in England, seventeen years ago! *Diablo!*" hissed the cornered villain, nerving himself for the terrific struggle against tremendous odds.

Then the motley avalanche closed about the forlorn crew, and clubs, knives, swords and pistols thudded, clashed and banged in the fearful struggle for life and death.

Pierre Plaque sat and shivered upon his seat, for this was no ordinary mob such as he had at many times figured popularly in. It was a new and treacherous episode in his career, from which he shrunk but could not avoid. As if completely paralyzed, he sat in his usual position, with heels to the headboard of the cart and toes projected, the reins hanging listlessly in his trembling fingers. His large one eye ogled upon the fight about him, and his small one eye glared ahead, while his stuttering thin lips were whining like a man with the ague:

"Oh! Oh! By the bones of the catacombs! this is more than I expected! A fight at hand and a fight in front! When we are through here, we shall be mixed in there! For I see the form of Philip De Vin, who is hated as intensely as Victor Bramont; and there is the person of Franz Edouin, the famous detective, who owes me a grudge for that little ride I gave him a night or two since! Between them all, I am a dead man, to a certainty! Ho! my head!"—as a hurtling missile struck and nearly knocked him senseless—"Before this is over, I am sure there will be no Death-cart driver! I am going mad! I was never so frightened as now! And all this for a woman—the sweetheart of Franz Edouin! Oh! if there were only no women in the world! Look out, there!"—kicking desperately at one who tried to deal a crack on his timid shins.

Meanwhile the cavalry, headed by furious, eager and confident Philip De Vin, came forward with a thunder of hoof-strokes. The detectives, by the command they had received, scattered like a line of skirmishers, so that the charging horsemen found no solid front to attack, and in a few seconds there was great confusion, as the mounted men sought here and there for the foes who shot them in their saddles or slashed and maimed their stirrups legs. Bridles were grasped and riders stabbed before the heavy sabers could finish the stroke of mighty sweeps. A fearful and deadly jam occurred, and the clanking of scabbards and the clashing of sharp steel, mingling with cries, groans and curses, smote the air with curdling echoes. Shouts and hoots issued from the windows. As the detachment of the National Guard was recognized, showers of stones and other missiles were hurled upon them by the hundred or more lookers-on in the houses lining both sides of the street. People rashly brave, and having at stake the roofs under which they lived, were pouring forth to the burning building and striving to subdue the flames ere their own dwellings caught in the destructive element.

The fighting between the thieves and Bramont's better-armed ruffians, and the combat between the

disciplined cavalry and well-trained detectives, the noise augmented by the voices of the people in the windows, all combined to form a scene like pandemonium, symbolized by the ringing of swords, the cracking of pistols and fierce yells of hate and defiance.

Apart from all this Philip De Vin—who had been roughly dragged from his horse, and who escaped, thus far, the steel and bullet of less important adversaries—was engaged in a fierce encounter with Franz Edouin, and it was while they thus fought that Pierre Plaque espied the two men who, he knew, were so deeply interested in the struggle for Osalind Ray—the first the man he had tried to assassinate in England, many years before; the second the man he had ridden in his Death-cart, and would have sacrificed to the fury of a drunken mob; and both men whom he had great cause to fear.

"Abominable detective!" yelled De Vin, pressing Franz Edouin at the point of his dextrous sword, "You have long escaped me! Once to-night you had me at a disadvantage! *Parbleu!* Now we are on equal terms! That for your heart!"

"And that to avenge Dorian Ray!" cried Franz, parrying the thrust of his adversary and discharging the pistol he carried in his left hand.

De Vin uttered a shriek of agony and fell mortally wounded. Almost over the fallen villain leaped the demoniac form of Victor Bramont, with blood-stained face and tattered garments.

Nearly all of the ruffians, overcome by the force of numbers, were killed or left dying by the wild horde of thieves, and Bramont, running this way and that, fleeing for his life and being pursued by a score of relentless foes, thus suddenly brought himself face to face with the man he hated with every throb of his vile heart.

"Ho! *Diablo!* You and I are at it again!" he howled, aiming a terrific stroke at Franz Edouin.

"Ay, scoundrel Bramont! Once again! Look well to yourself!"

A pistol cracked beneath the very feet of the two combatants, and as Bramont reeled and fell with a bullet through his head, a vindictive voice exclaimed: "*Parbleu!* Victor Bramont, you shall not live with a chance to possess Osalind Ray! Nor, you, either, Franz Edouin!"

There was another pistol-shot, delivered by the prostrate and fast dying wretch, and Franz, throwing up his arm, staggered and sunk upon the steps before the abode of Pierre Plaque.

Another than the Voodoo thus abruptly closed the vicious career of Victor Bramont, and she, in the galloping Death-cart, now rode upon the scene in time to see Bramont receive his death-wound from the pistol of Philip De Vin, who so unceremoniously took from her hands her special intention of vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRIUMPH OF FRANZ EDOUIN.

THE immense and wild concourse of thieves, having overcome and fairly annihilated the desperate crew led by Bramont, now pressed onward to the second scene of conflict, throwing themselves in a solid body before and around the Death-cart from which Xlmo, the Voodoo, was screaming her commands and flourishing her spiked mace.

"Forward!" she ordered, shrilly. "I see there Philip De Vin, who leads a rank of cavalry! Now then, at the cavalry—all!"

With loudly reverberating yells the mob-like mass rushed in, fraternizing with the detectives and throwing themselves, like an avalanche of a thousand furies, upon the entangled cavalry.

There was no longer order in the ranks, but one general hand-to-hand encounter, in which the mounted men were beset by a legion of dancing, darting devils whom they could not reach with their sabers, and who, with daggers, bludgeons and pistols, struck first upon one side and then upon another, regardless of the bones that were cracked between concussioning horses or the broken limbs given by prancing hoofs.

"Oh!" exclaimed one of the luckless cavalry, who was furiously attacked by four of the thieves, while one of the detectives held the bridle of the horse. "May Satan get hold of Colonel Philip De Vin, for leading us into this vile scrape! I did not come here to be massacred by a devilish rabble!—nor have I yet discovered what it is all about! Let me get out of this quickly!" and seizing a favorable opportunity, he cut down one of his assailants, at the same time digging spurs into his horse, and the snorting beast leaped clear of its rider's foes, bearing him swiftly away.

This flight of horse and rider, which occurred just as De Vin was shot down by Franz Edouin, and the others observing the fall of their leader, produced an immediate panic. Such as were able to extricate themselves gave their horses spur and rein, leaving their less fortunate comrades to a desperate fate.

It was in the moment of the precipitate retreat of the cavalry that the Voodoo drove up and witnessed the fall of Franz Edouin. She leaped from the cart and hastened to his side.

"Franz Edouin! Speak! Are you badly hurt?"

Fortunately for the young man, Philip De Vin's right hand and nerves, unsteadied by the presence of death, retained his aim a random one, and the murderous pistol-ball had merely grazed the skull of the intended victim, momentarily stunning him. Even as Xlmo spoke, Franz was rising slowly to his feet, dazed and bewildered by the concussion.

"Thank Heaven! I believe I am not badly wounded," he said, in reply to the anxious Voodoo.

"What of Osalind? Have you found her?"

"Ay—thank Heaven for that, too! But had you not come to my assistance, I fear it would have gone hard with me against my two deadly foes. They are now dead, and we need fear them no more."

"Curse them!" hissed the Voodoo, glancing at the two corpses on the pave. "I had hoped that mine would be the hand to slay Victor Bramont! Well, let it pass. We will see Osalind."

She rapped smartly on the door with her mace, and Helen Varela, hearing the voice of Franz Edouin, promptly answered the summons.

"My darling Osalind!—my love!—it is over! And now I must tell you that this lady is your mother. There is a long story, but this is hardly a fitting time."

"She knows all," interrupted the actress. "While that terrible struggle progressed without, I have

convinced her that in embracing me she is in the arms of the mother who has loved, longed and sought for her during seventeen years."

"Dear Franz," said the maiden, pillowing her head upon the breast of her love, "I am satisfied that I found my mother and that I shall love her dearly. With her and with you, my happiness should be complete. But, oh! tell me of my father. Have you seen him? Where is he? Can we not go to him at once?"

A grave silence followed this speech, and all looked at Franz Edouin, over whose face passed a shadow of pain.

"If your mother has told you all, has she not told you that Dorian Ray was not really your father, and that your father died in England, many years ago?" asked the Voodoo.

"Ah! true; she did. But Dorian Ray was ever a father to me, kind and loving. How can I think of him otherwise? Tell me of him, dear Franz. My very heart is bleeding for him; I dare not imagine what may have been his fate, after he was dragged from me."

"My poor, suffering love," he answered, in a low voice choked with emotion, "let the fact that Dorian Ray was not your true father help your strength over so little in hearing a sad piece of news which I consider it my duty to tell you even now. Can you be brave, my darling?"

"Speak, Franz," and her voice was weak and hushed as she uttered the words.

"While you listen, dear one, I will be brief and spare you all I can. I, far more than you, have cause for deepest sorrow. Dorian Ray, as I have this night learned, was indeed my own father."

"Your father, Franz?"

"Ay. But of that we will speak at some other time. Dorian Ray was imprisoned in the *Chancellerie*, by Philip De Vin—that monster in human garb—who used every artifice and threat to persuade his captive and victim into co-operating to make you his bride. Dorian Ray at last, when De Vin promised to have him shot at sunrise if he persisted in his refusals, professed consent to the arch-villain's plans. De Vin started for your house, to bring you and wed you in the prison cell as the price of the life of the man whom you believed to be your father."

"Oh, no! How can I think that?" sobbed Osalind, burying her face in her hands. "For though I would have willingly made any sacrifice to save such precious life, I cannot believe that he would have asked it of me. He was too brave, too good, too noble. Ah! I knew him well."

"Nay, you misjudge him. In his breast he carried a vial of poison, and when you had reached his arms, he would have asked you if you were ready to drink the poison with him and thus forever escape the persecution of all enemies."

"How gladly would I have done so, in such an alternative!" she wept.

"When De Vin had gone," continued the lover, "the guard at the door went into the cell. Ray knew the man. This guard once had a little daughter who lay sick and dying for want of proper medicines. Ray found her out, filled the sick-chamber with comforts and delicacies, cheered the despondent hearts of the parents and wore a happy feeling in the body and mind of the sufferer. The child recovered. In remembrance of this, the guard said to the despairing prisoner: 'Dorian Ray, you saved the life of my child. I will aid you to escape, even though I forfeit my own existence, for I know that there is one very dear to you, who needs your presence and protection.' The chains were unlocked, and when they had exchanged a portion of clothing the artist stole cautiously away. He did not easily escape. Being discovered, he was fired upon and—I must speak it, though it wrings my heart to do so—I held him in my arms when he died. With his last breath he told me that which I have told to you. I have taken steps to have him properly attended."

Osalind was weeping hysterically, and in her extreme grief could find no words for utterance as he finished the sad recital.

At that juncture the attention of all was attracted by an ominous murmuring without.

While the foregoing scene was being enacted within the house, there were sudden and significant doings among the vast crowd in the street, not embracing the thieves or detectives, for the thieves, discovering the identity of the men with slouched hats and capes, were rapidly disappearing in the direction of their various lairs and hiding-places, and dangers of the recent combat being over, scores of people were boldly coming forward, eager to ascertain the cause of the fray. Among these latter were two men who stood apart and conversed earnestly.

"There is Pierre Plaque and his outlandish cart!" exclaimed one.

"So it is. And scarce three days ago he hauled away a brother of mine, whom I have not seen since."

"I have almost a similar cause to hate the Death-cart driver, who has, no doubt, brought about all these dead bodies on the pave. Ha! as I live, there stands that witch, Xlmo, the Voodoo, in yonder doorway! I have a grudge against her for selling poison to my wife, which was intended for my stomach! Let us stab Pierre Plaque and incite a riot against this abominable Voodoo! Come!"

Pierre Plaque had remained seated upon his cart as motionless as a carved image. Not a finger or muscle moved. Suddenly he was jerked to the ground by the two men, and these men uttered a cry of surprise. The Death-cart driver was dead and stiff. In the very center of his forehead there was a hole where a stray bullet had pierced his brain.

Simultaneously with this act, there arose that ominous murmuring which attracted these in the house; for it seemed that others in the crowd had recognized the unpopular Voodoo, and the sound was caused by numerous mutterings against her.

Perceiving the absence of her late allies, the thieves, and realizing instantly the danger to herself and those with her, she cried out, quickly:

"Not a minute longer must we remain here! Come! Into the Death-cart—all! We shall be mobbed and killed directly!"

She sprang through the doorway, clutching her spiked mace aloft, and Helen Varela, though wearied from loss of blood, followed bravely with the sword

she had recovered from Franz Edouin. The friends of Franz, happening to be near the door, promptly aided the two women, and endeavored further to keep off the tumultuous crowd after the lovers, the Voodoo and the actress were in the cart. The horse was whipped up to full speed, and as they dashed off Xlmo glanced back and ground out between her gritting teeth:

"Deserted and beset! Miserable fortune! Those hounds will be after us, presently! But we shall elude them, never fear!"

On they sped. The cart was lightly built and the horse a powerful animal. They were soon beyond sight of the mob, but the Voodoo foresaw that the moment of a rise against her and her witchcraft was now at hand, and this moment she had constantly expected of late, being prepared for it in a way we shall see, and knew that, having started in this manner, she would be pursued to her den.

"Let them come—the fools! Do they think that I will calmly wait to be torn to pieces by them? It were better, friends, for us to leave Paris. Fortunately, I have provided the means."

As they reached *El Bibou* a female figure joined them.

"Ah! It is my faithful Annetto. Come with us, girl!" exclaimed the actress.

True to the foresight of the Voodoo, far down Rue de Lafayette they could hear the approaching mob, infuriated and bent upon destroying the sorceress of *El Bibou*. Entering the ponderous gates, which were carefully and strongly locked after them, Xlmo led the way by a narrow path to a shed in the rear of the building. Beneath this shed was a furnace ready to light, a gasometer, and every known improved appliance for the quick generation of gas.

The Voodoo moved busily about. Soon the furnace glowed and a strange, hissing noise was heard, accompanied by a crackling and rustling like the unfolding of silk. Presently something at the far end and exterior of the shed swung into sight and appeared to rise slowly, like a huge mound, growing larger and larger.

"Look!" said Xlmo, flashing a light in the direction of the singular spectacle. "Think you those coming hounds can catch us, unless they are provided with wings?"

"A balloon!" burst from the lips of all, as the monstrous thing rose higher and higher, expanding like a huge, dark bubble in the gloom.

"Yes, a balloon, and a good one. For a month past I have expected the danger which now threatens me, though I had not foreseen that it would involve others. Every day it has been my custom to partially charge my mammoth toy with fresh gas, so that when the moment arrived, very little more would suffice to inflate it."

"You must be in a hurry, then," warned Helen Varcla, perceiving at once the intention of the Voodoo, "for in ten minutes the mob will be at your gate."

"And in less than fifteen minutes we will start. It is now high enough for you to enter the basket. Get in, all. I must leave you for a few seconds," and as they obeyed, and as Xlmo moved away toward the house, Helen Varcla said:

"This wound of mine, dear daughter, is but poorly bandaged. Will you not try to make it easier for me?"

By the time Osalind had finished remedying the misplaced bandage on the hand and arm of the actress, Xlmo rejoined them. She carried a small, steel trunk containing the vast wealth of coin and jewels which had been accumulated during her career in Paris for so many years. On top of this trunk was perched the parrot, safely muzzled to prevent any outcry from its chattering tongue, and at her heels trotted the great black cat.

In a few minutes the howling mob arrived at the gate. Finding this fastened, the Death-cart was demolished and its various pieces used for battering rams and levers, while a hundred throats were shouting threats of vengeance upon the sorceress Voodoo.

It did not take long to force the gate; then over the pathway, in every direction, and into the owlish house, poured and rushed pell-mell the angry riot, applying the torch to all things combustible as they sought for the object of their wrath.

At the moment the gate crashed inward, Xlmo sprang into the basket with the others and cut loose the fastenings. Up, up, soared the balloon, floating silently away through the aerial darkness, and the voyagers looked down upon doomed *El Bibou* which was soon a mass of roaring flames.

Though comparative peace soon after reigned in the French capital, the surviving characters of our story have never returned thither.

Franz Edouin and his bride are living amid scenes of uninterrupted tranquillity, far from the vicinity of former trials, and Helen Varcla and the maid, Annetto, are with them.

The Voodoo was soon lost sight of, starting for Australa shortly after the wedding of the couple, to whom she gave a portion of the questionably gotten wealth.

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